nice hannibal ficlets

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by emungere

Summary

Premise: What if Hannibal weren't such a dick?

All from prompts I got on tumblr. These used to be with the rest of the tumblr ficlets but there are so many of them now I thought it would be easier if they had their own doc.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

- Translation into Русский available: Мимимилые ганнибальские зарисовочки by Vi_Ehwaz
- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: 【拔杯/中译】好好先生汉尼拔 by SleepyFlorence

encephalitis diagnosis

"What is it?" Will said. He poked at the dessert.

"A citrus souffle with raspberry coulis." Hannibal left his own untouched on the counter and watched Will take a bite. "You fear the loss of your mind," he said.

Will swallowed hard and barely managed to get the pudding down. "I'm afraid, but I don't know of what. This isn't-- I know the way my head works. It doesn't work great, but it's not like this. I feel like I've been invaded. Colonized."

Hannibal tapped one finger against the counter and then reached over it to press his palm to Will's forehead. Will leaned into it without thought. "You're very warm," Hannibal said. "Come with me, please."

Will picked up the plates and trailed after him. Hannibal took him down a hall and into a small room lined with books, with butterflies pinned and cased in glass, with twisted antlers that Will looked away from in a hurry. He let Hannibal settle him in a chair and stick a thermometer under his tongue and deposit a notebook and pen in his lap.

"I want you to draw a clock for me, please," Hannibal said.

Will frowned up at him.

"Humor me."

Will shrugged and drew a clock. Hannibal took the notebook from him and stared at it for longer than seemed reasonable to study a poorly drawn clock that didn't even have the right time.

"Hemispatial neglect," Hannibal said. "Time loss, hallucinations, headache." He paced to the far side of the room and back and then extracted the thermometer and looked at it. "And fever. I believe you have encephalitis. I'd like you to stay here tonight. In the morning, I'll take you to Johns Hopkins for an MRI."

Will stared at him. Hope and relief and fear that Hannibal might be wrong washed over him like breakers, and each threatened to drown him. "Just-- Just like that? How can you know?"

"I've suspected for some time, but it could have been many things. It's not impossible that the stress of your work is responsible for much of it."

"So what makes you think it's not just that?"

"Your description of the symptoms as alien. And the scent."

"What?"

"Forgive me. You were right, the other day. I have a peculiarly sensitive nose, and although it's true that it was difficult to avoid smelling you, your aftershave, though unfortunate, was not what caught my attention. Many diseases have a certain scent. Cancer can have a sour scent. Diabetics sometimes smell like acetone strongly enough for anyone to detect it."

"So...what do I smell like?"

"There is a heat that has been steadily growing over our acquaintance. A fevered sweetness that I put down originally to other causes."

"You really think I'm sick?"

"I'm almost positive."

Will leaned over and put his face in his hands. His heart hammered against his ribs until he felt the vibration in every bone in his body. "So I'm not going crazy."

"Let's at least address the physical issues first."

Will snorted. "Reassuring."

Hannibal put a hand on his shoulder and squeezed lightly. "Whatever it is, I have no intention of leaving you to deal with it alone."

And, though Will had no intention of admitting it, that *was* reassuring.

how they got together

Hannibal stood in Will's kitchen, slicing mushrooms. Will watched him out of the corner of his eye from where he sat on the floor with the dogs all around him. Hannibal had driven him home from the hospital to a scrubbed-clean house and dinner half-prepared in the fridge.

Will had been at Johns Hopkins for three days. During that time, he'd eaten exactly one half of a meal courtesy of the hospital. Hannibal had arrived in the middle of breakfast and arched his eyebrows with such blatant outrage that Will had set the tray aside immediately. Three meals a day, and he'd sat with Will long enough and often enough that Will had multiple hazy memories of sleeping, waking, and finding Hannibal still at his bedside.

"Did you work at all this week?" Will asked.

Hannibal slid the mushrooms into a pan and stirred them into the onions before he answered. "I took a few days off."

Will unbent himself and stood, hand on the mantle for balance before he made his way into the kitchen. He ached all over from the fever, from being in bed too long, from the tension of the hospital stay and too many strangers. "A few days," he said to Hannibal's back.

"Yes. Would you care to chop the thyme?"

Will took up the knife and got to work on the pile of little leaves. The scent rose up, clear and woody. "Were you going to tell me?" he asked.

Hannibal was silent a beat too long. And then another. And another. "No," he said finally. "Do you want me to leave?"

"Why would I?"

"Under the circumstances, you might believe I intend to presume on our friendship."

"I think you intend to make me dinner and maybe tuck me in if you can get away with it. Why didn't you say anything?"

Hannibal looked at him over his shoulder. "I wished to avoid any sense of obligation on your part."

"I don't feel obligated."

Hannibal went back to stirring his mushrooms. "You're unwell. You need friends around you. I had every intention of being what you needed and no more than that. I suppose I shouldn't have imagined I could keep my feelings from you. I apologize for any unwelcome intrusion."

Will slowed his knife and then stopped it altogether. He looked down at the thyme, now minced beyond recognition. "It's not unwelcome," he said and then he had to clutch the edge

of the counter as his heart started to pound.

Hannibal's back went stiff and straight. Muscles shifted in his forearm, and his fingertips grew white against the handle of the wooden spoon. "Are you certain?"

"We can take it slow, right?"

"I think that would be wise, considering."

"Considering?" Will said.

"Your health, your lack of previous relationships with men, and my … attachment."

Will wanted to reassure him, but he didn't have the words and he was abruptly so tired that he wasn't even sure he'd make it through dinner. Not the best time for heavy duty relationship talks.

Hannibal poured white wine into the pan with a hiss and a cloud of steam. "The sauce will be ready soon."

"I'll set the table," Will said. He paused as he passed Hannibal at the stove and laid a hand between his shoulder blades. Hannibal leaned into the touch.

packed lunch

Will had set up with his laptop and his lunch in a corner of the empty BAU break room. It took about two minutes for Beverly to drift in and drop onto the couch beside him.

"That smells amazing. Can I have some?"

He nodded and nudged it toward her.

"Where'd you get this? What is it?"

"Hannibal. Something with duck fat and potatoes, I don't know. It's good."

"Of course it's good. God, you're lucky. Hey, what's this? Did he pack you a note with your lunch? That is adorable."

He let her steal it and kept on eating.

"Will. This is in Latin."

"I know."

"You can read Latin?"

"No. He thinks I should learn."

Price and Zeller came through the door, arguing about blood spatter on tile floors. "I took Latin in college," Price said.
Beverly handed the note over. Zeller stole some of Will's grapes. Price frowned. "Something about a person made from snow?" he said.

Zeller plucked it from his hand. "Snowman," he said. "This is a joke about a snowman. A bad joke about a snowman, and it's not even dirty."

"Your boyfriend is weird," Beverly told Will.

Will smiled. "Yeah. I know."

first kiss

A solid month into his relationship with Hannibal, there had been no kisses, no more physical contact than they were accustomed to, nothing that would suggest to an outside observer that they were more than friends. Will turned that phrase over in his head a lot these days. More than friends. None of his previous relationships had been in any way 'more' than the friendship he had with Hannibal.

But this, whatever they were doing now, was more. He couldn't put his finger on how or why. It was a coalescence of warmth when Hannibal looked at him, or the lunches Hannibal could not be dissuaded from packing for him when he went back to work, or the phone calls when they weren't eating dinner together. Will felt like he called too often, but Hannibal always sounded pleased to hear from him.

Will was doing the dishes one night, scalding his hands in hot water while Hannibal dried, when it occurred to him that he could be happy like this for the rest of his life. He paused, suds sliding from his wrists.

"Will?"

"Nothing," Will said. Hannibal would know it was a lie, but it seemed impossible to express his happiness without implying that he didn't want more and impossible to say he wanted more without implying some kind of lack in what they had. And he didn't find it lacking.

He went on scrubbing risotto from the plate, but he could feel Hannibal's mood shift. He bit at the side of his tongue, half to keep from saying the wrong thing and half as punishment for not knowing what the right thing was. He could be happy like this, sure, but only if he didn't fuck it up.

"Perhaps I should leave you," Hannibal said. "You must be tired."

It was his first full week back at work, and he was tired. Tired enough that he lost his grip on the plate when he reached for Hannibal's wrist with the other hand. The plate sank out of sight, and he left a hot, wet handprint in the fine blue cotton of Hannibal's sleeve. He stared down at it.

"Sorry," he said, but he didn't let go.

Hannibal covered Will's hand with his own, and even that much contact was rare enough that it made Will's breath come short.

"Don't leave," he said. "Unless you want to. I don't want you to, I mean. Don't leave because of me."

Hannibal's face went soft in a way that Will had only ever seen happen because of him. He dropped his gaze and smoothed his thumb over Will's knuckles. "All right. Let's finish then."

They got through the dishes. Will wiped down the counters while Hannibal made tea. They sat across from each other to drink it. Will looked out the window and thought about the inevitable moment when Hannibal would have to start the long drive back to Baltimore. He could feel Hannibal watching him, still waiting for Will to spit out whatever was on his mind.

Will held the mug up to his face and breathed in orange scented steam. "When I was thirteen this girl in my class asked if I'd be her boyfriend. I said yes. Took me about a week to work up the nerve to kiss her."

"Yes?" Hannibal said, polite inquiry, eyebrows raised.

"But she didn't duck when I tried it. I'm better now than I was then, promise."

"Have I ducked?" Hannibal said.

He hadn't, not exactly. He just seemed to have some kind of sixth sense about Will's intentions and a knack for moving things smoothly on until the moment had passed. "Do you not want to?" Will asked.

"I do. Very much."

Will looked at him finally and found that Hannibal was now staring off toward the darkened kitchen. "So why haven't we?"

"You have had enough to deal with since you got out of the hospital."

"You're not something to deal with," Will said, maybe too forcefully. He set his mug down and wound his fingers together, twisting the joints. He sat on the edge of his seat, as close to Hannibal as he could be without getting up.

"In a way, I am. The physical aspects of our relationship--"

"There aren't any physical aspects."

Hannibal set his own mug aside and sat forward. He took Will's hand between his own and turned it over. One finger traced the lines on Will's palm, slowly, fingernail digging in just enough to wake up the nerves.

Will swallowed. "I could deal with some more of that."

"Could you?" Hannibal murmured. He didn't look up, just unbuttoned the cuff of Will's shirt and followed the shadow of his veins up to the crook of his arm. His thumb rested there on tender skin, stroking. "Perhaps I was worrying needlessly."

Will shifted closer, and their knees touched. "I've thought about it, you know. With a few guys. Just never did anything about it."

Hannibal bent down and kissed the inside of his forearm, halfway between wrist and elbow. "Part of me would like to ask why you thought about it and never acted, but I'm afraid the larger part of me is supremely unwilling to hear anything about you and other men."

His voice was low and soft and sent heat curling through Will's stomach.

"If you don't want me to kiss you, now's the time to duck," Will said.

Hannibal looked up, hair falling loose across his forehead, eyes almost black in the dim light. Will closed the few inches between them. He put a hand on Hannibal's cheek and then the other on his shoulder to tug him closer. Hannibal's lips parted under his immediately. The slick touch of his tongue made Will clutch him tighter. He felt the light friction of stubble under his fingers and Hannibal's hand on his thigh. He could smell his aftershave.

Will tipped his head just a little and spread his legs so that Hannibal's knee fit between his. They eased closer. Hannibal's breath came out hot and shaky against Will's mouth, and it was all Will could do not to push him back in the chair and just climb into his lap. He retreated an inch and licked at his lips.

Hannibal raised a hand to touch his own mouth. "I won't duck again," he said.

classroom kiss

Hannibal kissed Will in front of his class. Or, not exactly in front of, but definitely before they'd all left the room, which was basically the same thing.

It wasn't much of a kiss, just a brief, dry press of Hannibal's lips to his own. Will put a hand on his arm without thinking and smiled into it, transported momentarily away from work because Hannibal's kisses had come, more quickly than should've been possible, to mean home. Hannibal's kitchen, his own house, a chilly walk in the fields, sitting in front of the fire with the dogs afterward. Happiness had become a conditioned response to his company.

"What are you doing here?" he said. And then he heard the silence into which his own words had plunged. He looked around. A handful of students had stopped on the way to the door, and most of them were staring openly.

He turned to Hannibal, who gave him a look of such manufactured and implausible innocence that Will wanted to laugh. After a second, he did. "Okay, I guess I know what you're doing here."

"I came to take you to lunch," Hannibal said.

"Liar." He looked at the knot of students still huddled by the door. "Problem?" They shook their heads and scooted out.

When the door had closed behind them, Hannibal smoothed down his tie and the lapels of his jacket and left his hands on him. He leaned in and kissed Will again, tender and insistent. His breath fell warm across Will's mouth and cheek.

Will tugged him closer. "You could've just said you wanted me to tell people."

"And left you with the problem of bringing it up in conversation over the autopsy table? This seemed more efficient."

"You know, most people would ask before they pulled a stunt like this," Will said.

"My experience as a psychiatrist suggests that many people wouldn't. Although, to be fair, I seldom hear about the decisions that worked out well for my patients."

Will shook his head, more amused than he thought he should be. "Take me to lunch."

*

The news got to Jack faster than Will had expected, and Jack got to Will just after lunch.

"I heard a rumor today," Jack announced as he pushed through the door of Will's office with a perfunctory knock.

Will tapped a stack of print-outs against the desk to square it off. "You shouldn't listen to rumors, Jack."

"I don't. That's why I came to get the truth. Straight from the horse's mouth."

Will wavered between getting the conversation over with and making Jack spell it out. Getting it over with won by a landslide. "You brought Hannibal in to be my handler. If you've got complaints about how he's handling me, you can take them to him." He took his glasses off and looked Jack in the eyes. "Whatever you came in here to say, don't say it."

Jack narrowed his eyes. He watched Will for a few seconds, gave him a short nod, and walked out.

*

Will went to Hannibal's house for dinner that night. He found him, as expected, in the kitchen, apron tied in place, sleeves rolled up to the regulation two inches below his elbows. He gave Will the same brief, warm kiss he'd given him in his classroom.

"I could get used to this," Will said. "Do you think Jack can?"

"I think he will." Hannibal adjusted the heat on whatever he was cooking and started slicing a lemon into paper-thin translucent rounds. "He was less dictatorial than I had expected. What did you say to him?"

"I threw you under the bus. Said if he had complaints he could talk to you. I'm not interested in arguing about this."

Hannibal nodded thoughtfully. "Have you spoken to Alana?"

"Not yet. Why? Have you?"

Hannibal gave him a tiny smile over his shoulder. "Yes. I told her she should talk to you about it."

Will grinned. "What did she say to that?"

"She said it was the first time she'd known me to let anyone else speak for me."

Will looked down at the growing pile of lemon slices, grin fading into something smaller and warmer, to match the feeling in his chest. "I'll do my best," he said.

Hannibal drew him close until they stood side by side, touching from shoulder to thigh. "I have no doubt."

hannibal's bedroom mirror

The steady drip, drip sounded over and between the driving rain against the windows of Hannibal's house. Will was drying the last of the dishes after lunch while Hannibal put away what he had already dried.

"That's not your roof leaking, is it?" Will looked up toward the ceiling. In his house, it probably would have been.

"No, it's the tap in the master bathroom."

"I'll take a look at it," Will said.

"There's no need."

"It probably only needs a new washer," Will said. He looked out the window into the gray afternoon. The rain had been lashing down so hard on the drive over that he'd barely been able to see the road, but it looked better now. A trip to the hardware store shouldn't be a problem.

"I can call someone about it on Monday," Hannibal said.

Will shrugged and started for the stairs. "You might have to anyway. We'll see."

Hannibal followed him. "You shouldn't feel obligated to--"

"What? Look at your sink for five minutes?"

"Do anything you don't want to do," Hannibal said.

Will paused on the stairs and turned back toward him. "I don't feel obligated. I just think it's stupid to pay someone when you've got me."

Hannibal set his hands at Will's waist and looked up at him from one step below. "Do I? Have you?"

"You could. Any time you want. I thought I'd made that pretty clear. You're the one stalling. If you've changed your mind--"

Hannibal moved so quickly and so smoothly that Will barely registered the transition between standing there talking him and being pinned hard against the wall with Hannibal's body flush against his and Hannibal's tongue in his mouth. Will arched against him and wrapped his arms around his neck and tried not to moan. It had been a long few weeks of kissing and very little else.

"I have not changed my mind," Hannibal said against his mouth. "But now is not the time."

Will sighed. At least he'd get to see Hannibal's bedroom, even if the circumstances weren't quite what he'd been hoping for. They parted slowly and climbed the remaining stairs close together with Hannibal's hand low on Will's back.

The bedroom was about what Will had expected: dark, subdued, with a vaguely threatening opulence. A set of Japanese armor lurked by the door. Every surface was clear of clutter: no piles of books by Hannibal's bed, no robe or clothes left out, nothing to suggest that anyone actually lived here. It gave Will the urge to lie on the bed and wrinkle the bedspread.

"It's through here," Hannibal said. He led the way around a black and gold screen and into the bathroom. The sink dripped with a steady sound against the porcelain.

Will got down on his knees to turn off the water under the sink and let the tap run until it stopped. "Do you have a toolbox?"

"No," Hannibal said.

Will frowned. "Not at all? Something I can use to pry the cap off the faucets?"

"A knife, perhaps," Hannibal said, clearly reluctant about having his knives used for anything outside the kitchen.

"Screwdriver?"

Hannibal shook his head.

Will grappled briefly with the idea that anyone could get through life without a screwdriver and then stood. "I need to go to the hardware store for the washers anyway. It shouldn't take long."

*

At the hardware store, he got what he'd need for the job and then stopped by the hammers. He was already getting Phillips and flathead screwdrivers and an adjustable wrench. It wouldn't hurt to have the basics at Hannibal's house. A hammer, maybe a utility knife, tape measure, level, small toolbox to put it all in.

It went fine until the 'small toolbox' part. They had nearly a whole aisle, but most of them were big enough to park a compact car in.

"Anything I can help you find, sir?"

Will turned to the guy, whose name tag said he was Ron. Ron was in his mid twenties with a disordered mop of brown hair and a broad, open face.

"Maybe," Will said. "I just want something that'll hold this." He nodded to the cart.

"Oh yeah, sure. This way. Or we've got sets if you want? Is this all for your kid?"

Will shook his head. He'd seen the sets. They looked cheap. Normally, he would've left it at that, but he could almost feel Hannibal standing next to him, wanting everyone to know. And maybe this was as good a time as any to say it out loud. "For my boyfriend," he said.

Ron just nodded. "I got some stuff for my girlfriend. There's this set that's like pink for girls? She wasn't into it, so now I'm using it and it's great. None of my roommates steal my tools. Anyway, here's the toolboxes. Anything else I can help you with?"

"No, thanks," Will said.

*

Back at Hannibal's house, he parked down the street and took a few minutes to peel the labels and price stickers off of everything and to pack it into the toolbox -- the nicest one he'd been able to find, wood and brass, since the idea of Hannibal keeping some lump of gray plastic in his house seemed improbable at best.

His steps slowed as he got closer to the house, suddenly unsure what he was doing, what he was offering with all of this. If it was a good idea. If it was something Hannibal even wanted. Not just the tools, thought the tools would be the easiest to take back. He stopped on the doorstep and glanced toward the car, considering doing just that.

The door swung open. Hannibal stood there, sleeves still rolled up from cooking lunch, shoes off. "How long did you plan to stay out here?"

"It's none of my business if you want to call a plumber," Will said.

Hannibal took his elbow and ushered him gently inside. "It can be your business."

Will gave him a sidelong glance, trying to gauge what exactly that meant. "Yeah?"

"Regardless of the number of tools you buy me, I have no interest in acquiring the skill to go with them. I'll have to call someone." Slight stress on 'someone.'

"Call me," Will said.

"If that's what you prefer." Hannibal took a step back, smiling as he led the way upstairs.

Now that he had what he needed, the repair job went quickly. Will replaced the washers on both faucets, cleaned off the mineral build up, and put it all back together. It might have gone faster if Hannibal hadn't watched him the entire time.

"You enjoy this?"

Will shrugged. "It's useful work. You do it and it stays done."

"It provides satisfaction." Hannibal leaned against the wall, close enough that their arms brushed as Will worked.

"More or less. Don't you do anything that isn't …"

Hannibal raised his eyebrows and tilted his head.

"I don't know," Will said. "Mentally demanding? Something to turn your brain off?"

"That is neither possible nor desirable."

Will smiled and tapped the cap back onto the last faucet. They left the bathroom together, Hannibal leading. Will gave the bed a wistful glance and paused for one last look around the room because God only knew how long it would be before Hannibal let him up here again. That was when he saw the mirror.

It hung on the wall opposite the bed, gilt-framed and tilted out from the wall at an angle. Will looked at the bed, at the mirror, and at Hannibal's back. Hannibal stopped in the doorway.

"Will?"

Will sat on the edge of the bed. He took off his shoes. "I'm testing a theory," he said. He was actually testing two. The first was that he'd be able to see himself reflected in that mirror while lying on Hannibal's bed, and it turned out to be correct. The second was that Hannibal would have a hard time seeing him there and not doing anything about it, which also turned out to be correct.

Hannibal came closer and rested one knee on the edge of the bed. Will looked pointedly at the mirror and then back to him. "The human body is a work of art," Hannibal said. He set a hand on Will's hip. "Some more than others."

"You don't need flattery," Will said. "You could've had me here weeks ago."

Hannibal pulled his hand away slowly. "And there are reasons I haven't."

"Planning to share those any time soon?"

"I'm afraid you wouldn't be very happy with me if I did."

Will stretched and settled more comfortably. "What if I said I wasn't moving until you do? Your bed's nice."

Hannibal's eyes traveled along the line of body. "I can't say that's a terribly good incentive, Will."

"Why don't you come here and we'll talk about it."

Will held out a hand. After a second, Hannibal sighed and took it. He moved to lie down next to Will, but Will shook his head and pulled him closer until he knelt between Will's legs.

"What?" Will said. "Afraid of moving too fast? Afraid you'll scare me off? You're going to have to tell me sooner or later."

Hannibal dipped his head to nuzzle at Will's neck. "I would prefer it to be later. If that's all right."

Will smiled and tipped his head back. "I could be convinced."

Hannibal licked up his throat and set his sharp teeth against Will's skin, digging in just enough to make Will breathe out hard and clutch at his shoulders. Will spread his legs and let Hannibal settle down between them, body a warm, solid weight against his. Will looked over his shoulder at the two of them in the mirror and stared at the curve of Hannibal's shoulders, the power in them, the way Will looked under him.

"I guess I can see the appeal," he said. It came out a little breathless.

Hannibal glanced back at the mirror, one corner of his mouth turned up in a tiny smirk. "Yes, you look as if you can."

Will took Hannibal's face between his hands and kissed him hard, tongue sliding against his. Hannibal pressed down and spread Will's legs wider with the weight of his body. The spark of heat from that was so fierce that Will had to pull away from the kiss to pant. He wound a hand into Hannibal's hair and pulled his head back. They stared at each other, and Will dropped his gaze to Hannibal's mouth and wanted to do it again. And again. Just this for the rest of the day, maybe the rest of his life. He leaned in and licked along Hannibal's swollen lower lip.

"Tell me why we should stop," he said, voice rough. "Because I'm really not seeing it."

Hannibal let out a long shuddering breath that Will could feel in his chest and on his cheek. "I worry about pushing you too hard. I worry that you will be too inclined to give me what I want."

"Are we talking about gratitude and obligation again? Because I thought we were past that. And if you're actually saying I'd fuck you out of gratitude, you were right. I won't be happy with you."

"How often in relationships have you been the initiator?" Hannibal asked.

Will frowned at him, heat dissipating, though they still held each other painfully close. "You mean in sex?"

"I mean in any way. Sex or simply asking someone to dinner. Anything."

Will thought about it. He wished he could see the point Hannibal was trying to make, but sometimes Hannibal was opaque even to him. "Not that often, I guess."

"Ever?" Hannibal asked.

Will opened his mouth, closed it, and thought again. He shrugged. "With you. Every step of the way. I feel like I'm dragging you along sometimes."

Hannibal sat back and rested his hands flat on Will's stomach. "And how often do you believe that your desire has been influenced by your partner's?"

Everything snapped together in Will's head at once, all of Hannibal's reluctance in the beginning, his reasons for not saying anything, the long weeks before they'd even kissed.

"Unduly influenced?" he said carefully. Something was boiling over in his chest, but he couldn't even name it. Not quite anger but hot like anger, not quite fear, maybe something like a snail felt when yanked from its shell. Pain and wriggling exposure.

"I have seen you with Jack. Even with Agent Katz. With forceful personalities--"

Will put a hand over his mouth to shut him up. He couldn't speak himself, and he needed silence. Space. Two things Hannibal had always meticulously given him whether he wanted them or not. To make sure that his choices were his own.

Hannibal waited, still as stone. He didn't get off Will, didn't make assumptions about what he might want. He waited for Will to tell him. That left Will with the problem of deciding what he wanted, a problem that he now recognized as being almost unique to his relationship with Hannibal.

"I don't know whether to walk out or say thank you," he said finally.

"You wanted to know my concerns. Now you know. But I am not you and I don't know your experience of the world. I might be wrong, but I -- I have worried."

Will drew him back down, feeling that this conversation would be a thousand times easier if they didn't have to look at each other, or at least if he knew that Hannibal couldn't see his face.

Hannibal held him tightly and kissed him behind his ear. "You have every right to be angry. It would have been, perhaps, more appropriate to leave your choices to you, regardless of why you were making them. Part of this is my own disbelief that you would want this without …"

"Undue influence?" Will said.

"Yes."

Will laid a hand on his back and rubbed up and down his spine. He could feel Hannibal's distress in his own throat, and he knew exactly why Hannibal had been bothered by this idea. And he knew it wasn't an entirely unfounded fear.

"I wouldn't be with you if I didn't want to be," he said. "I lose arguments with Jack because he's right most of the time, not because I can't say no."

"I'm very glad to hear that," Hannibal said, slightly muffled against his shoulder.

Will watched himself in the mirror. He could see the anger surfacing, and he was glad Hannibal couldn't. "You know that's a hell of a thing to say, right? That I don't know what I want? That my 'yes' isn't worth anything because I can't say no?"

"It was a fear, not a psychiatric assessment. I was trying to avoid saying it." Hannibal spoke against his neck, and his hands gripped the back of Will's shirt.

Will ran his fingers through Hannibal's hair, carefully gentle, barely touching. "I don't know whether I'm glad you said it or not." He paused for a few seconds. "It's not totally off the mark. It's hard to -- to draw that line. I can do it, but it takes effort, and sometimes the effort doesn't seem worth it. I've been in relationships where I let the other person lead. In pretty much everything. Where I ended up wondering what I was doing with them. But everyone does that sometimes. Don't they?"

"It's not uncommon."

"But it's never been that way with you. Not once. It's always been what I want. I don't think I've ever known myself as well as I know myself when I'm with you."

Hannibal raised his head at that, and his expression was so raw that Will could barely look at him. All that feeling, unnamed emotion, wild and dark, all for him. Will felt he really could get lost in that and he knew, with certainty, that Hannibal felt the same way about him.

scene of the crime

Chapter Summary

the prompt was for emotional h/c.

Will sat on a folding chair behind the small suburban ranch house and tried to breathe deeply enough to clear the taste of decay from the back of his throat. Weeds crept around the edges of the yard, bishop's weed and crabgrass mostly, one in the shadows and the other in the sun. The grass in the middle had been mown recently. A plastic car sat near the patio, and a red and blue ball was partly concealed under a misshapen holly bush.

Will stared hard at it to keep himself from seeing other things. His head was full of the scene inside, so full it kept spilling over and pouring out onto the grass in front of his eyes. All he could do was try to remember what was real. He wasn't sick anymore. His last MRI had come back clean. But somehow it felt harder than ever to make himself look, like he was staring at the sun, slowly blinding himself, and blood might be the last thing he'd ever see.

A hand landed on his shoulder. He jumped and jerked away, twisted round to look up at -- Hannibal. "What -- what are you doing here? Did something happen? Are you okay?"

"I am," Hannibal said. "Are you?"

"Yeah, of course. I'm fine."

Hannibal just looked at him.

Will looked past him at the darkening garden. "Did someone call you? How long have I been out here?"

"Long enough for me to drive here from Baltimore."

Will put his face in his hands and mumbled an apology. "You didn't have to do that."

"Let me take you home, Will. Please."

There was nothing on Earth he wanted more. "I can't. The case."

"The bodies were being taken away as I arrived. Surely the autopsies won't be until morning."

"I should--" He had no idea what he should be doing right now. He wanted to go through the house again, wanted to get everything he could, get the killer, have this be over. But then there would be another one. A lifetime supply of death, delivered to his doorstep. "I'll go home," he said. "You don't have to come. I won't be good company."

"I would like to take you home. If that's all right," Hannibal said.

Will started to refuse and then had an uncomfortable moment of geographical vertigo. Where exactly was this house? The name of the town had slipped out of his head to mix with the blood on the grass. Maybe he shouldn't be driving. "My car," he said.

"Agent Katz offered to leave it at Quantico for you. I can take you to pick it up in the morning."

Will looked up at the concern in Hannibal's eyes that he couldn't quite hide. He was trying, Will knew. Trying to give him space and leave him free to choose. Will chose to be swept under by his concern. He stood and let Hannibal guide him toward the car.

They had to walk back through the house. Hannibal didn't touch him, but they were getting stares anyway. Will's boyfriend coming to pick him up because he couldn't handle the crime scene. It wouldn't do his reputation any good, but what the hell would? He was either too fragile to be an agent or on the verge of becoming a killer, and he was out of patience.

He reached back for Hannibal's hand, and Hannibal took it with no hesitation. Will tugged him forward to walk by his side instead of following him, leaned into his shoulder, grateful for Hannibal's sheer solidity in a world that seemed to be drawing away from him like a receding tide.

One of the forensic techs made a whispered comment. Will didn't catch the words, only the tone. He was caught in the split second of wondering whether he needed to do something about it when Jack loomed up behind the guy and bellowed in his ear. "Something you wanted to share with the class, Agent Lane?"

Will pulled Hannibal on out the front door and left Lane stammering and ashen behind them. "That was entertaining," Hannibal murmured.

"It was something," Will agreed. He leaned into the hand Hannibal put on his back and closed his eyes for a second, letting himself be guided blindly toward the waiting Bentley. Letting go, trusting that Hannibal would catch him.

He had let go so thoroughly that they were on the road by the time he opened his eyes again. Hannibal had buckled him in and was driving with one hand. The other held Will's wrist, two fingers pressed against his pulse point like an anchor.

"How are you?" Hannibal asked.

Will just shook his head. "Don't really know. I'm not used to this."

"This?"

"Having anyone around. After." Nothing about Hannibal's face changed, but Will could see the anger in him anyway. Will laid a hand carefully over his. "I didn't want anyone. It was easier to be alone."

"And now?"

"I'm a little pissed off that Beverly called you. But I'm glad you came."

"I am glad to be here."

"Will you stay with me tonight?" Will stared straight ahead as he said it, nerves winding taut, though he knew the answer would be yes.

Hannibal shifted his grip to lace their fingers together. "Of course."

Will closed his eyes and leaned back in the seat. Home. His dogs. Dinner. Hannibal sleeping next to him. "Thank you," he said. He thought he might thank Beverly in the morning too.

drawing will

Will lay on the bed after dinner, shoes off and sleeves rolled up, watching Hannibal do the dishes. He'd been banned from the kitchen, allowed only to clear the table and pour them both a glass of whiskey. "I'm going to fall asleep if you don't let me help," he called.

"Then sleep. I will wake you when I'm done."

Will drifted, eyes half closed. A fire burned in the fireplace. All the dogs were flopped down in front of it, basking in the heat. Will could feel it warming his toes. He watched Hannibal's back moving under his smooth blue shirt, looked too long at the back of his neck and the curve of his ass. He let his eyes close entirely and held that image in his mind to block out everything else.

The next thing he knew was Hannibal's hand on his ankle. "Will. I said I would wake you, but you can sleep."

"It's early," Will mumbled. He started to sit up against the pillows.

"Don't. Stay as you are. Would you do something for me?"

"Yes," Will said.

"You ought to ask me what it is first."

Will shook his head. "Answer's yes. So tell me what I'm doing."

Hannibal's gaze dropped to his hand on Will's ankle. "Posing for me, if you don't mind. I'd like to draw you."

"Naked?"

"Just as you are."

"Then why do you sound so nervous about asking?"

"Not nervous. Cautious," Hannibal said.

"You don't need to be that cautious about everything with me, you know."

"I know. But I think you enjoy it in some ways. I'll get my sketchbook."

Hannibal walked out to the car, trailed by Buster and Daisy. He wasn't wrong. Will had gone from being frustrated by the space and freedom Hannibal offered him to being fascinated by it, by just how much control Hannibal was willing to give up, by the possibilities.

They still hadn't had sex. Now it was Will who was putting it off, or just not insisting on it, which came to the same thing. Hannibal was waiting on his decision, and some part of him

enjoyed that sense of power a little too much.

Hannibal returned with a sketchbook and pencils in a small leather case. He pulled a chair from the table over to face the bed, sat down, and set pencil to paper almost immediately.

"Do I have to stay still?" Will asked.

"No. Move as you like. This will not be a copy from life, only a series of sketches."

Will didn't move much anyway. He was tired and happy to lie still and watch Hannibal's hand move and his gaze flick between Will and the paper in front of him. Back and forth, up and down, like the steady beat of a metronome and just as hypnotizing. Will's eyes closed a little more on each tick.

"Will?"

"Mm?"

"Do you still want me to stay?"

Will rubbed his eyes. Hannibal was sitting next to him on the bed, hand on his cheek. "Did you finish your drawing?"

"For now."

"Can I see?"

Hannibal produced the sketchbook and turned it to the relevant page. Will saw about a dozen versions of himself, asleep, awake, on his back, on his side, firelight reflected in his eyes and warming his skin and hair. In one of them, he seemed to be wearing a thin sheet and nothing else. He raised his eyebrows at Hannibal.

"Artistic license," Hannibal said with a smile.

"Which one do you like the best?"

Hannibal looked down at the page so seriously that Will had to smother a grin. He tapped the one in the upper right corner, Will looking out from the drawing with half closed eyes and a sleepy expression.

"Why that one?" Will asked.

"Your consciousness of being observed. I am present in the drawing as well, through your awareness of me. We see and are seen together."

Will smiled and tugged at Hannibal's wrist. "Come here."

"I am here."

"Closer." Hannibal set the sketchbook aside and climbed onto the bed, kneeling beside him, waiting for instruction. Will pulled him down and held onto his shoulders as Hannibal kissed him. "That's good. Don't stop."

Hannibal stretched out beside him, one arm over his chest. His tongue teased at Will's mouth and pressed inside, breath soft on his lips. The dim scent of his aftershave curled around both of them, something smokey that wove through the woodsmoke scent from the fire.

Will tugged at the back of his shirt. "Closer. I want you between my legs again. Come on."

Hannibal made a low, harsh sound. He slid one leg over Will's and stopped there, lying against him, the hard line of his cock against Will's thigh and his breath coming short. He turned his head away, and Will took his face in both hands to kiss him again. Hannibal pressed a hand under Will's back and brought their bodies closer together, Will arched up against him, Hannibal with his teeth against his throat.

Will pulled at his hair. "Don't stop. Do not stop, or I swear--"

Hannibal thrust once against his thigh and then his full weight was between Will's legs, cock pressed up against Will's and both of them hard. He ground his hips down.

"Yes, fuck--" Will clutched at his hair and shirt and then let go to yank at belts and zippers and buttons until he had them both bare.

Hannibal was laying down kisses and nips along his neck. Some deep rumble of approval rolled up out of his chest as Will rocked up against him. Hannibal reached for their cocks, but Will took his wrist and then the other and held both tight.

"Just move," he said.

Hannibal obeyed. He moved in long, slow thrusts. The slide grew easier, slicked with pre-come. Hannibal bent to press their mouths together, and Will let go of his wrists to wrap both arms around him. His legs came up against Hannibal's sides, and his hands ran down to the bared skin where Hannibal's shirt had come loose from his unzipped pants.

They moved together, breathing hard, every thrust winding their bodies tighter. Hannibal pushed his fingers through the hair at the back of Will's neck, and Will got both hands on his ass, pressing down as he thrust up. He could feel sweat on his spine and the desperate, harsh press of Hannibal's mouth on his.

Hannibal came first, fingers so tight in Will's hair that it hurt, mouth open against his cheek and jaw. Will couldn't make himself wait after that. He grabbed his cock and jacked himself with Hannibal's come on his skin and came in seconds, one heel digging into the back of Hannibal's thigh, teeth set in his shoulder through his shirt.

Hannibal pushed himself up on one hand and looked down at him. "I want to draw you like this. Exactly like this. Now. Please."

Will nodded permission, and Hannibal reached for his sketchbook, pants still unzipped, semen drying on his stomach, eyes that barely left Will's face.

the lecter fan club

Will had been aware of Hannibal standing in the doorway of his classroom for the last few minutes of his lecture. He'd meant to keep everyone in their seats till the bitter end, but he let them go without the five minutes of review he'd planned. Whether that was merciful or not, he wasn't sure. They might be sorry when he sprung the test on them tomorrow.

Hannibal joined him at his desk while he was packing up and stole a brief kiss. That got a whistle from some brave soul at the back of the room. Will ignored it. He'd prefer that to the group of students who suddenly clustered near the exit, waiting. Hannibal had done a guest lecture two weeks back and proved bizarrely popular with the class.

"Lunch?" Hannibal asked.

"Sure. After you deal with the Lecter fan club."

Gracious as always, Hannibal stepped forward to talk to them. Most of the questions were things they could've looked up easily or should've already known, and they were still at it ten minutes later when Will had stalled with packing up and shutting off the projector for as long as he could.

He put a hand on Hannibal's shoulder. "Ready?"

"Of course. You'll have to excuse me," Hannibal said to the few trainees still hovering around him. He let Will draw him out of the room with a light touch on his back.

"Sorry about them," Will said.

"I think it bothers you more than it does me."

"It doesn't bother me."

"No?"

Will shrugged. "Not much."

"Since I know you don't want their attention, I can only assume you want mine. Undivided."

Will smiled a little. "I'm used to you being in demand."

"I prefer some demands to others."

They walked in silence to the end of the hall.

"I don't have anymore classes today," Will said.

Hannibal's hand brushed his and caught hold for a second. "Then perhaps we should go home for lunch."

"Yeah. Let's do that."

christmas cookies

Occasionally, Will resented Hannibal's consulting work with Jack because it meant he could get a visitor's pass with ease and show up out of the clear blue sky. Will seldom appreciated surprises at work, even when they brought him lunch.

Today though, he was having a hard time keeping the grin off his face. Only Hannibal would bring Christmas cookies to an autopsy.

There were the usual snowflakes and Christmas trees, but, because this was Hannibal, the snowflakes looked like they were made out of lace and they'd been gilded with edible gold foil. The frosting on the trees was practically photorealistic. The doves, iced in white on white, looked like they could fly away at any second.

"Oh my god. They're too pretty to eat," Beverly said. "Did you really make these?"

Will pointed a finger at Hannibal, who had already taken a breath to reply. "No. She doesn't need the lecture on the functionality of beauty." He turned to Beverly. "Just eat the cookies. He has more. A lot more."

Hannibal gave him a look that said *it's not a lecture*. Will didn't reply, silently or otherwise, because it definitely was a lecture. Hannibal put an arm around his shoulders in retaliation. "Will helped. It was his idea, in fact."

"I measured powdered sugar for the icing. And it was not my idea. How was it my idea?"

"I believe your exact words were 'Aren't you having three hundred of your closest friends over this weekend? Go bake something.' I wasn't planning on cookies for the party, but it was surprisingly enjoyable. I might do it again next year."

Will resisted the urge to hide his face in his hands, if only because he was still wearing gloves from the autopsy. He'd been trying to finish up his paperwork from the last case with a hand creeping up his thigh and Hannibal going after his neck like a vampiric vacuum cleaner. "You were distracting me."

The smile Hannibal gave him was both fond and triumphant, which probably meant Will was blushing.

"I can't decide if you two are sickening or adorable," Beverly said.

"Both," Price said. "It's definitely both."

Zeller just looked vaguely depressed. "I hate this time of year," he said with most of a dove in his mouth.

So of course Hannibal invited all three of them to the party -- Jack and Bella were already coming -- because his idea of spreading Christmas cheer involved forcing people to stand

around in uncomfortable clothes and eat unidentifiable food. It was a nice gesture, and Beverly accepted with glee. Price seemed bemused by the offer, but that was his default response to everything. Zeller pulled Will aside on the pretext of showing him something on the body.

"Is there a dress code for this thing?" he asked. He looked as desperate as Will had felt when he'd realized he really couldn't avoid it this year.

"You don't have to go. He won't be offended."

"I'll go. It's supposed to be good for you, right? Getting out, meeting new people?"

"So I've heard," Will said. "It'll be suits and ties mostly."

"Right, thanks."

*

"Were the cookies just an excuse to stop by and invite them?" Will asked on the way home.

"Not only that, but it was a factor. I thought you might feel more comfortable if more of your friends were coming."

It did seem like a slightly less grim prospect, even if he wouldn't exactly count Price and Zeller as friends. At least he'd have someone to talk to. "Thanks. I think."

"It's not a lecture."

"It's a lecture," Will said.

"It's an interesting topic."

"I'm not saying it's not. Just that she'd spent the last four hours getting fingernail scrapings and fiber samples off a dead body. It wasn't the best time for philosophy."

"I take your point." Hannibal paused. "If you truly don't wish to come ..."

Will reached for his hand. "I'll be there. I want to."

It wasn't a lie, despite his reluctance. The party was important to Hannibal, so it was important to him. They probably were fairly sickening now that he thought about it.

the christmas party

Hannibal's Christmas party was Friday night. The guests started filtering in around sunset. They emerged, glittering, from dark sleek cars and hurried through a -2 degree windchill to Hannibal's door. Will received most of them.

Earlier in the day, he and Hannibal had discussed that arrangement like adults. Hannibal had said he needed to supervise the kitchen. Will had said he'd managed fine up till this year. Hannibal had said he had Will this year, and that would make things much simpler. Will had somehow stopped himself from saying either that he wasn't Hannibal's hostess or that he'd rather wait in the car or under the bed for the entire party. He had, in the end, agreed to man the door.

He was now grudgingly glad that he had. In the glimpses he got of Hannibal gliding out of the kitchen to make sure everyone had wine, weird food on sticks, and conversational partners, he could see that something was off about him. Hannibal's smile wasn't quite as ready as he might have expected, maybe. Or his reaction to the compliments regarding his food came a quarter second too late. Nothing his guests would notice, but Will noticed.

The doorbell rang again. Will summoned up a smile that just barely managed to be more than a baring of teeth and went to open it, Hannibal's odd behavior forgotten in the social onslaught.

It didn't come back to him until much later when they had seen the last of the guests off and then the hired staff and closed the door behind them. Will turned the deadbolt and put on the chain. He looked to Hannibal, who was standing perfectly still, eyes still fixed straight ahead.

"Hannibal?"

Hannibal blinked slowly. He shook his head. "I ought to clean up the kitchen," he said, but he didn't move.

"It's clean. They did it. You were standing right there for half of it complaining about water spots on the crystal."

"Yes, of course," Hannibal said. "Then …" He looked around. "Is there anything more to do?"

Will frowned. "Are you okay? Never mind, you're obviously not. What's wrong?"

Hannibal finally focused on him. "I may have a fever. And I'm … a bit tired."

Will put his wrist to Hannibal's forehead. "You definitely have a fever, and you look like you're about to fall over. Why didn't you say--" Will shook his head. "Never mind again. Stupid question."

"I could hardly send them all home. What sort of a host would I be?"

"Like I said, stupid question. Come on." Will took his arm and led him upstairs. With every step, Hannibal unwound a little more, and his social facade chipped and cracked until he was yawning and leaning against Will's side. Will sat him on the edge of the bed and knelt to untie his shoes.

"I can do that," Hannibal said.

"I know you can. I'm doing it. Do you feel sick apart from the fever?"

"I'm perfectly well," Hannibal murmured, drooping forward until his chin rested on the top of Will's head.

Will steadied him and kissed his forehead. "Uh huh. I'll get you some aspirin." He went into the bathroom. By the time he got back with water and aspirin, Hannibal had exactly two shirt buttons undone in the center of his chest. He hadn't taken off his tie. "Wow," Will said.

Hannibal shot him an irritated look and pulled at the tie. He got it off and started on the buttons from the top. Will handed him the aspirin and finished the job while he swallowed them down. "How long?" he asked.

"I started feeling unwell yesterday evening," Hannibal said.

"That's why you told me to go home last night. You didn't want to give it to me."

Hannibal nodded. He unfastened his pants and stood to let them slide down to the floor. He stepped out of them and promptly sat back down on the bed. Will pulled back the covers and got him lying down.

Hannibal closed his eyes. "Goodnight, Will. You might want to stay away for a few days."

"I'll stay away for about five minutes while I turn the lights off." Will left before Hannibal could argue. He checked all the locks, rescued a stray glass from the floor behind the harpsichord, and turned off the lights.

Hannibal was sitting up in bed when he got back. "You should go home," he said. "Or at least sleep in the spare room."

Will started undressing.

"Will."

Will folded his clothes and Hannibal's and set them on a chair. "Do you want me to go?"

Hannibal looked at him for a few seconds and then dropped his gaze and shook his head. "I never want you to go. That doesn't mean it isn't for the best."

Will nudged him over and got into bed beside him. He pulled Hannibal close and met with resistance for about two seconds. Hannibal gave in all at once with a sigh and laid his head down on Will's chest. He fit his fingers into the spaces between Will's ribs.

"I'm not leaving," Will said. "I'll make you soup tomorrow."

"Do you know how?"

"You can come down and make sure I get it right." Will rubbed slow circles into his back. "If anyone calls, I'll tell them I'm sick too. We'll see how long we can get away with it."

He could feel Hannibal's smile against his skin. "You won't stay home when you're ill but you will when I am?"

"No work. It's the weekend."

"What if Jack needs you?"

Will kissed the top of his head. "Go to sleep, Hannibal. I'm not going anywhere."

aftershave

Hannibal was aware of Will staring at him from across the kitchen table. It was a long few minutes before he spoke.

"Hannibal, did you ... do something to my aftershave?"

"Yes. I washed out the bottle and replaced it with something more tolerable."

Will took a sip of coffee. "Why?"

"Your sentimental attachment, if any, was to the ritual of application, perhaps to the familiarity of the bottle. You don't care about the scent."

"And you do."

"Very much."

"So you'll overlook the dog smell, the sawdust, the engine oil, and the eau de autopsy, but this is the hill you're gonna die on?"

"Yes," Hannibal said firmly.

Will shrugged. "Okay. I don't really care about the bottle either. Just get me whatever you want next time."

Hannibal didn't look up from his newspaper. "Who buys it for you? You didn't choose it yourself."

Will made an amused sound through his nose. "Should've asked before you dumped it, shouldn't you? My vet, Dr. Fields. It started as a joke. There was a thing with a skunk. She gave me that stuff, I gave her perfume. It just sort of kept going."

"Dare I ask what sort of perfume?"

"Probably better not."

"I will come with you next time."

"To sniff out the perfume or to make sure she knows I'm taken?"

Hannibal looked up, prepared to protest, although not as prepared as he would've preferred to be.

Will's expression was warm and fond. "Never mind, doesn't matter. Come with me wherever you want," he said.

post-budge

Will was still half-deaf from the gunshot when Jack called him. All he caught was Hannibal's name, Budge's name, and then he remembered Hannibal's patient, and then he was in the car. Halfway there he acquired a police escort by blowing through a red light at an unsafe speed. Jack was waiting on the street for him, and Will left him to deal with the cop.

He ran for the stairs and took them two at a time. The door to Hannibal's office stood open. It was never open. He paused just outside and tried to get his breathing under control. Tried to prepare himself.

The first thing he saw was a bodybag. His lungs seized up. He took two stiff steps into the room and heard a noise to his right. He turned to look. Hannibal had risen from his desk chair and stood staring at him. He had blood on his mouth, bruises, some kind of cut on his leg.

"Will--" Hannibal stopped. His eyes were bright. His hand twitched toward Will and then smoothed the line of his pants.

Will came closer, step by step. He touched Hannibal's wrist. It had a deep red line cut into it. Budge's wire. Hannibal reached out and stopped again, and Will couldn't take it anymore. He pulled him close and felt Hannibal's body mold to his.

"I thought you were dead," Hannibal said in his ear. "He said he'd killed two men. I thought you were dead."

"I'm sorry I didn't get here in time. I should've known where he was going."

Hannibal shook his head. He held onto the back of Will's coat with both hands, twisting the fabric. "He killed my patient. And then I killed him."

Hannibal sounded perfectly calm about it, but Will had heard him sound perfectly calm about a lot of things. He reached up to lay a hand over the back of his head. "Are you okay? Did the paramedics check you out?"

"I am capable of evaluating my own wounds," Hannibal said stiffly.

Will nudged him back into the chair. Hannibal held onto him a second longer and then let go and folded his hands in his lap. Will leaned against the desk and looked down at him. "Jack will be up in a minute. We'll talk to him and then I'll take you home. Okay?"

"To your house," Hannibal said quietly. "If that's all right."

"Anywhere you want."

*

It was evening by the time they made it to Wolf Trap. The setting sun burst through low clouds in sprays of red light. Will carried Hannibal's bag for him. In the house, Hannibal limped directly to the bathroom and started the shower.

"I'll make dinner," Will said. "Is there anything you want?"

Hannibal took his bag silently, shook his head, and shut the door.

Will fed the dogs, let them out, thought about dinner. He didn't think about the conversation he'd had with his girlfriend in New Orleans the day she dumped him. She'd said she couldn't date a cop anymore, that she worried all the time. It was fair. He hadn't blamed her for it.

Hannibal had been attacked in his office. He'd killed a man. He had better reasons to worry than Kate ever had. Will made fish curry for dinner. Kate had taught him the recipe. It seemed appropriate.

*

After dinner, both of them read for a while. Hannibal had changed into crimson silk pajamas. He looked good, despite his tired expression. Will spent too much time thinking about touching him and not enough concentrating on his book.

"You haven't turned a page for the last ten minutes," Hannibal said.

"Tired. Aren't you?"

"Yes. Perhaps we should turn in."

In bed, with the lights off, Will finally made himself say it. "It's okay if you don't want to do this anymore."

Hannibal turned onto his side. "Do what?"

"This. Us. After today -- don't worry about me. If you're trying to find a way to say goodbye, you can just say it. It's okay."

"What makes you think I'm doing that?"

"Experience? Sorry." He looked up at the shadows on the ceiling. "I just mean I wouldn't blame you. I dragged you into my world, and you ended up--" A killer. "In a bad situation."

Hannibal was quiet for a long time while the wind whistled around the eaves and rattled the glass in the windows. Will could smell his own shampoo on Hannibal's fine, soft hair.

"Why do you think I asked to stay with you tonight?" Hannibal said.

"You didn't want to be alone."

"No. Because I wanted to be with you." He curled his hand around Will's forearm. "If you had been there, you would have killed him for me, wouldn't you?"

"Yes." Will swallowed. "I wish I had. So you didn't have to."

"I know." Hannibal tugged him closer. Will put a cautious arm around him, and Hannibal leaned into his chest with a sigh. "I don't want to say goodbye, Will. I feel safe with you."

Will stared at him, more shaken by that than he would've been by a breakup. Hannibal closed his eyes. He was asleep a few minutes later, drawing long, even breaths that fell against Will's skin. Will lay awake, replaying that last sentence in his head to the tune of his own fear and an uncertain, rising joy.

post budge: the morning after

The day after he killed Tobias Budge, Hannibal woke before dawn. Will could hear him rattling around in the kitchen, though he left the lights off and carefully muffled the closing of every cupboard and drawer. Will listened to the gentle clink of the saucepan on the stove and saw a slice of light from the briefly opened fridge door. He checked the clock. Not even five yet.

"Hannibal. What are you doing?"

A short silence followed. "Making biscuits. And jam. I'm sorry to have woken you."

"You can wake me. I don't mind." Will sat up and rubbed at his face. "I'll make coffee." He shuffled into the kitchen, watched by a few of the dogs. None of them got up from their beds by the fireplace. It wasn't morning yet, and they were used to him walking around at odd hours.

Hannibal met him at the edge of the kitchen and pulled him into his arms. Will leaned against him. He closed his eyes and rubbed his cheek along Hannibal's, feeling the rough stubble and the kiss Hannibal brushed against the corner of his mouth.

"Go back to bed," Hannibal said softly.

"I'm up. No point." Will patted his chest and yawned. "Don't worry. That's about as much sleep as I usually get. And I never get biscuits."

Hannibal kissed his temple. "What shall we have with them?"

"I can make redeye gravy." He squinted over Hannibal's shoulder at the fridge. "I might have ham."

"You do."

Will nodded and moved past him toward the coffeemaker.

"That wasn't the first time I killed a man," Hannibal said.

Will stopped for a second and then he got the coffee out of the cupboard, filled the coffeemaker, and switched it on. He turned to lean back against the counter. Hannibal was standing in the center of the kitchen. He held a dish towel in one hand. His mouth pulled down at the corners, and his entire expression was heavy, like a sky expecting rain.

"Is that why you're making biscuits at five in the morning?" Will said.

"I was trying to decide whether I should tell you. I had decided not to."

"You know what goes great with conversations about death?"

"Coffee?" Hannibal said.

"Coffee."

The coffee brewed. Will squeezed Hannibal's shoulder as he passed by him on the way to the fridge to get out the ham.

*

It was still dark when they sat down to eat. Will had let the dogs out, and now they were flopped around the room, staring hopefully at the table but too well-trained to beg.

Hannibal soaked up gravy with a piece of biscuit. His face had returned to its usual calm lines. "I told you that my family was dead," he said.

Will nodded.

"My parents were killed first and then my sister. By the time they came for me, I had found a pair of garden shears in the back of the shed. I cut off one man's hand, and I impaled the other man through the chest. And then I ran away into the forest."

Will made himself finish chewing and swallow. "A man so bad that killing him felt good?"

"Yes. I remember it as one of the golden moments of my life. I looked for the other man years later, hoping to repeat the experience. I never found him." Hannibal examined his face. "You're not surprised."

"Not when I think about it. Did it feel good to kill Budge?"

Hannibal shook his head slowly. "Not good. Not in the same way. Necessary, perhaps."

"It was self defense," Will said. He tried not to make it a question.

"It was, but not that sort of necessity. I thought he had killed you. If he hadn't attacked me, I don't know what I would've done."

Will put a hand on his wrist. "It doesn't matter what you would've done. It matters what you did. And that's what you're going to put in your statement."

Hannibal nodded and passed a hand over his eyes. "I'm not a fool, Will. I won't give Jack any reason to doubt me. I didn't even plan to tell you. But I was so afraid you were gone. And so angry with him because of it."

"Why did you tell me?"

"I don't know. You got out of bed and came to me. You still smell of gun powder. And I knew I had to. That's all."

"I'm glad you did."

Hannibal scraped his fork through the gravy and set it aside. "Should I make you the same offer you made me last night?"

"I don't want to say goodbye either." He paused. "And I feel safe with you."

"You didn't always."

"You peeled back about seven layers of my brain the day we met."

"I couldn't help myself," Hannibal said. "At some level, I think I was trying to impress you."

Will smiled. "You impressed me with a need to get out of the room in a hurry.

"But you don't feel the same urge now."

"No," Will said. "I'm not going anywhere."

After breakfast, they left the dishes on the table and got back into bed together. Will lay on his side behind Hannibal, wrapped around him. They watched for the first light of dawn.

first fight & dancing lessons

“No,” Will said. He kept plunging the toilet, standing as far back as he could so he wouldn’t splash his work clothes. He needed to leave in less than ten minutes. “I mean, no thanks. Not my thing.”

Hannibal stood in the doorway and watched him. “It won’t be a long evening. It’s for a good cause.”

“I’m not paying two hundred dollars to go to a dinner party when I’d rather be doing almost literally anything else. Including this. If it’s that good a cause, I’ll pay not to go. How’s that?”

Hannibal frowned. “I didn’t imagine the charity would lure you away from home for the night, but I thought my company might.”

“Sorry. Sounds awful. Even with you.”

“Who will I dance with?” Hannibal asked.

That did stir a twinge of jealousy, which was probably the point. Will gave the toilet an especially hard plunge. The suction gave way and the plunger slipped sideways, spraying him with dirty water. He closed his eyes.

“Fuck. You wouldn’t be dancing with me anyway. I can’t dance. Leave it, okay?”

“I’ll ask again when you’re in a better mood.”

Will let go of the plunger and wiped his face on his sleeve. “Hannibal. I’m not in a mood. I hate those things. You know I hate those things. Why are you even asking me?”

Hannibal looked down at him. “I can’t imagine,” he said.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing. It was a foolish thing to ask. Forgive me.” He turned and left.

Guilt and anger joined the jealousy to marinate in the pit of Will’s stomach.

*

He was late to class, late to the autopsy scheduled that afternoon, and out of sorts all day. Now that he was legitimately in a bad mood, it seemed wise to text and cancel dinner with Hannibal. He’d say something he’d regret. Or Hannibal would say something that Will would regret. It would end badly. He told Hannibal he had a headache, which wasn’t even a lie.

He got no reply at first. Hannibal almost always texted back immediately unless he was with a patient, and he wasn’t with one now. Will sat at his desk and went through his paperwork

and pretended that he wasn't checking his phone every few seconds. It beeped with a text about fifteen minutes later: *Thank you for letting me know.*

Like Will was canceling an appointment. He could feel the restraint behind it, the anger and hurt and fear. Hannibal had yet to be convinced that this thing between them would last. Will knew that. He could see it written in letters the size of the Hollywood sign behind Hannibal's eyes every time they skirted the edge of disagreement. It wasn't surprising that this would bring it out.

It wasn't that Will didn't feel for him, but a little trust would've been nice. After Hannibal had admitted to killing two people and all Will had done was make sure he wouldn't give himself away to Jack. Just a little trust.

Too annoyed, with himself and Hannibal, to reply, he put his phone away and headed for the car.

"Hi!" Beverly said brightly as he opened his office door.

Will kept walking. She caught up and walked beside him. "Is this about the case?" he said. It wasn't. He could sense it.

"No, I just wanted to ask you something."

"You don't want to ask me right now."

"I have to though. It's time sensitive. As in an hour from now time sensitive."

Will sighed and stopped. He hoped he looked like a man who had nearly swallowed dirty toilet water that morning and was currently participating in a text message cold war with his significant other. It was funny how the word 'boyfriend' was so much harder to apply to their relationship when he was pissed off at Hannibal.

"You do look cranky," she said. "But I already asked Thing One and Thing Two, so it has to be you."

"What has to be me?"

"Dancing lessons. I signed up when I was still seeing someone and now I am not seeing someone, but I still want to go. You have to bring a partner."

"Let the teacher demonstrate on you."

"It's already paid for. Come on. This one time, and if you really hate it, you don't have to do it again. Don't you want to try new things? Have new and exciting experiences? Make fun of people less coordinated than you are?"

"There are no people less coordinated than I am." He rubbed his eyes. The prospect of an evening alone wondering what Hannibal was doing, equally alone, loomed up like an iceberg through the fog. He didn't want to deal with either the irritation or the guilt. Or the nagging

irrational worry that *thank you for letting me know* might be the last thing Hannibal would ever say to him. “All right,” he said.

She stared. “Really?”

“You drive.”

“Yeah! No problem. Great. Let’s go.”

*

It wasn’t as bad as he’d thought it would be. It was ballroom. The music was staid and stately and required no very fast movements. He’d assumed that Beverly was exaggerating about bringing a partner and would find someone else who actually wanted to be there and allow Will to lurk in a corner, but no. He did actually have to dance.

The teacher came by and adjusted his position. He held it until Beverly whispered to him: “You look like you have an actual poker up your ass, Graham. Relax.”

He didn’t exactly relax, but he did try to let a little more movement into his spine. Inevitably, as they moved around the scuffed wooden floor with five other couples, he thought of Hannibal and Hannibal’s charity ball. Hannibal dancing with someone else when he’d rather be dancing with Will.

The teacher patted Will’s arm at the end of class and told him not be discouraged. Beverly kindly hid her laughter by turning away to put on her coat.

“I’ll find someone else for next week,” she said in the car. “Don’t worry. I just got caught short and I didn’t want to miss the first lesson.”

“No, it’s okay. I’ll do it,” he said.

She stared at him for so long that he felt compelled to grip the wheel and steer for her. She flapped a hand at him and looked back at the road. “You don’t have to,” she said.

“If you want to find someone else, that’s fine.”

“No.” She glanced at him once more. “No, it’d be nice. If you really want to. Any particular reason?”

He shook his head. Not one that he wanted to share, not even in the privacy of his own thoughts.

*

Hannibal was at Will’s house when he got home. In the kitchen. Of course.

“What are you making?” Will said. He hung up his coat and crossed to the kitchen doorway to watch Hannibal’s peculiarly expressive back. The shift and roll of his shoulders sometimes said more than his face did.

“Chicken soup.”

“I’m not sick, Hannibal. It’s just a headache.” Even that was mostly gone after the concentration required by trying not to step on Beverly’s feet and then the long, quiet drive home. He stepped closer.

Hannibal turned his head, scenting him, and then he turned a fraction more, face blank. Will could imagine what he was smelling: perfume, sweat, whatever scents were common to a dance studio. None of which were found at Quantico. Will said nothing. If Hannibal wanted to know, he could ask.

He didn’t ask. “You feel well apart from that?” He touched the back of his hand to Will’s forehead.

“It’s not encephalitis. I’m not sick. It’s just a headache.”

“I see,” Hannibal said after a pause.

Will could read between the lines too easily: he was fine and therefore there had been no excuse for his unreasonable attitude this morning. Except that his attitude had been perfectly reasonable. Maybe he could’ve expressed it better, but Hannibal could’ve picked just about any other time to ask him too.

“It smells good,” Will said, aware that he sounded stiff and ungrateful. He felt stiff and ungrateful.

“It’s nearly ready,” Hannibal said. “Five more minutes for the noodles and then you can eat.” He set the wooden spoon down on the counter. “I’ll leave you in peace.”

Will let him go. He couldn’t face eating the soup. He put it away in the fridge and had a sandwich and a glass of whiskey instead.

*

Hannibal didn’t call, didn’t text, didn’t show up at Will’s house unannounced to make soup or anything else. Two days went by, and it felt like a month. Will took the dogs out for long walks in the fields at dusk and thought too much.

It had been — he’d thought — a minor quarrel. He’d just wanted one night alone. Had Hannibal smelled the perfume on him and assumed he was cheating? That seemed unlikely verging on unbelievable. Hannibal knew him better than that. He couldn’t still be mad about the charity ball thing. Could he? No. Not this mad.

So the reason Will hadn’t heard from him was that Hannibal thought he didn’t want to hear from him. Which was, maybe, not the most unreasonable assumption.

Will walked and walked in the gray light. Hardened snow creaked under his feet. If he didn’t call, would that be it? Relationship over? Hannibal had always been careful to give Will the space he needed. Sometimes too careful.

Will whistled for the dogs and headed back to the house. He'd meant to call but, when he picked up the phone, it didn't seem like enough.

*

The doorbell at Hannibal's house sounded like a faraway gong. Will had to ring it three times before he got a response. Every light in the house was on, or he would've assumed Hannibal had gone to bed. Or that he was out somewhere, dancing with someone who wasn't Will.

The door opened. Hannibal stared at him, lips slightly parted. He was barefoot, in pajama bottoms and Will's gray sweater and he was holding a bottle of wine by the neck. Something in the way he gripped it suggested he'd been thinking of using it as a weapon.

"Can I come in?" Will said.

Hannibal stepped aside. Will followed him into the kitchen. His wineglass was on the table next to his armchair in the corner. A few drops of red wine sat on the wood. The glass was almost empty. Will eyed the bottle.

"Would you like some?" Hannibal said. His voice was rough, as if he'd been asleep.

"Thanks." Will got down a glass and took the bottle to pour for himself. It was nearly empty too. "Just so we're clear, I'll tell you if I never want to hear from you again, okay? I won't leave you wondering."

Hannibal paused, back stiff, and then he picked up his glass and finished it off. "I understand," he said.

Will rubbed at his eyes. "No, you don't, or you wouldn't sound like that."

"Then perhaps you should explain it to me more clearly."

An apology stuck in Will's throat. He could feel it every time he swallowed. He shouldn't have to apologize. It hadn't been that big a deal. Except that, for Hannibal, it obviously had. "Why didn't you call?" he asked.

"Why didn't you?"

It was a completely reasonable and infuriating question. Will drank down his wine. "Open another bottle," he said.

"There's no need. I have one in the study."

Will followed him into the study. There was a low fire, barely surviving on a few charred logs. Hannibal poured them each a fresh glass of red from a half-empty bottle. This one tasted darker, heavy and thick with fruit.

"You always call," Will said. "When I don't or when I forget. You always have, even before we got together."

“Perhaps that was a mistake on my part.”

“Why was it a mistake?”

Hannibal leaned back in his chair and looked into the dying fire. “Why did you come here tonight?”

“I missed you. And — and I got this idea that if I didn’t do something, we might just never see each other again. That you’d just let me go. Just like that.”

“Is that what a reasonable person would do?” Hannibal swirled the wine in his glass. “I don’t know anymore. I only know that what I want from you is not reasonable and that what I would do to keep you is less so. I have tried to act as if—“ He broke off for a long drink of wine. “To behave properly,” he said.

“As if what?” Will said.

Hannibal was silent for a moment. He finished his wine and then tossed the glass gently into the fire where it shattered with a flare of orange flame. “As if I don’t ache for you every moment we’re not together. As if anything I feel for you is reasonable. As if you shouldn’t be afraid of me.”

“I’m not afraid of you.”

“You are,” Hannibal said. “You worry that I care for you too much. You’re right to worry. I don’t handle my own emotions particularly well. I never have. Not as a child and less so now that I have — or had — fewer of them.”

Will poured more wine and came to sit next to Hannibal on the sofa. He offered him his glass.

Hannibal took it but gave him a sidelong look. “I really am more than drunk enough to tell you anything you want to know, Will. This isn’t necessary.”

“I do worry sometimes. But I like it too. Not healthy, right, Doctor?”

Hannibal spread a hand out in the air and let it fall. “Also not uncommon. The need to be desired is a powerful one. It leads people into all sorts of ill advised relationships.”

“Is that where it’s led me?”

Hannibal finished Will’s wine too and sent that glass after the first one with more force. “Yes. I must say yes. I try to behave as normal people would behave, but I know that I am not like them.”

Will looked over at him, at the light flush of wine on his cheeks and his lowered lashes, hands clasped loosely between his knees. “What are you like, Hannibal?”

“I have imagined consuming you,” Hannibal said.

Will paused. “That’s not a metaphor, is it?”

“No. It is not.”

Will thought of Hannibal as a child, killing two men with garden shears, trying years later to find the third. To repeat the experience. He thought it was probably a very good thing that Hannibal hadn’t found that third man.

He moved closer until their thighs and shoulders touched. “I don’t think either of us are that reasonable,” he said. He took Hannibal’s hand in both of his. It felt hot, almost burning to his cold skin. “I was waiting for you to call. I got worried you’d let me go without a fight.” He paused, weighing his words. “I want you to fight for me.”

Hannibal turned slowly to look at him. “That I can certainly promise you,” he said. “Easily.”

Will pressed a kiss to his closed mouth and tasted wine. “Good. Let’s go to bed.”

“Is that all you have to say?”

“You’re not going to eat me, Hannibal. You’re not Garret Jacob Hobbs.”

Hannibal blinked slowly at him. “I should hope not. I think I could do a little better than sausages.”

“I’m sure you could.” Will pulled him up off the sofa and guided him toward the stairs.

Hannibal seemed steady enough until he took the first step up, and then he caught at Will’s shoulder with one hand and the bannister with the other. “Oh,” he said.

“Careful. Drunk enough for honesty is more than drunk enough to fall down the stairs and crack your head open.” Will guided him up with an arm around his waist and helped him undress, Hannibal watching him all the time with wide, bright eyes.

“I’m sorry,” Will said when they lay in bed together.

“For what?”

“I might’ve been a dick before about your party. Not really sure. I’m not that great at being normal either.”

Hannibal pressed up behind him, close and very warm, arm across his stomach. “You are forgiven.”

*

Will woke up the next morning to find Hannibal sitting up in bed with his face in his hands. “Is that pain or regret?” Will asked.

“Both.”

“Aspirin?”

“Please.”

Will got him some. After he’d taken it, Will pulled him down so that he lay with his head in Will’s lap. Hannibal kept his eyes closed.

“Do you remember what you said?” Will asked.

“Not all of it. Not clearly. There was brandy before the wine.”

Will rubbed at the lines of pain on his forehead. “Do you remember throwing two really nice crystal wineglasses in the fire?”

“Yes,” Hannibal said, pained. “It was kind of you not to laugh.”

“Wasn’t funny at the time. You were too upset. Anyway, none of it that was bad. I’m still here, okay? If you could try to believe I’m not going to ditch you the first chance I get, I’d appreciate it.”

“You believed that was what I would do, after the incident with Tobias Budge.”

“That’d happened to me before.”

“And this has not happened to me before,” Hannibal said.

“This?”

Will looked down at him, hands resting against the warm curve of his skull. He met Hannibal’s eyes and saw everything in them, all that need and reckless desire on display like something in a shop window. Something he could take home with him and keep forever.

*

It was that moment that decided him. A couple days later, he asked Jack for the name of his tailor and made an appointment.

Mr. Pell was a small man with quick hands, bright eyes, and a heavy Georgia accent. Will fell into old speech patterns almost without noticing. That helped, a little, though Will still hated the entire process, the measuring, the scrutiny, the endless questions.

“I don’t know,” he finally told Mr. Pell. “Whatever you think, okay? I just need a nice suit.”

“Nicer than what you came in here wearing,” Mr. Pell said. His tone implied that this would not be hard to manage.

“Yeah. Nicer than that,” Will said.

“Well, what it’s for? Getting married?”

“It’s a charity thing. Some ball. In a few weeks.”

Mr. Pell's eyebrows went up. "The Sterling? How does a country boy from Georgia end up at the Sterling Ball? I've been making up suits for that thing for the last six months."

"Rich boyfriend," Will said shortly.

Mr. Pell laughed. "And you look like you're planning on hating every second. Well, let's see what we can find for you." He pulled out a book of fabric samples but, thankfully, did not ask for Will's opinion again, on cut, color, or anything else.

Will sat on a velvet stool and rested his forearms on his knees. He was planning on hating every second. He was hating every second in advance. That probably wasn't the way to do this if he was going to do it, and it did seem like he was going to do it. Dancing lessons and a custom suit. New shoes, too.

After what Hannibal had said, Will felt like he should have more doubts about being with him. Instead, he had fewer. Maybe it was just the reassurance that Hannibal was as fucked up as he was. He'd never been the more stable half of any previous relationship. He was starting to think he might be in this one.

*

He went back to the dance school with Beverly the next week. Halfway through the lesson, Beverly frowned at him. "Why are you taking this seriously all of a sudden?"

"You'd rather I wasn't?"

She just looked at him.

"I had a teacher who made that face when I tried to eat the crayons," Will said.

"I can and will step on your foot with my very sharp, pointy heels. Is this something to do with Hannibal?"

"Why would it be something to do with Hannibal?"

"Well," she said. "One, because who else would you be dancing with? And two, there's no one else I've met who can get you to do anything you don't want to do, and you pretty obviously don't want to do this."

"I do," Will said. "I'm here, aren't I?"

She gave him the crayon-eater look again.

"He wanted me to go to this thing with him, and I said no. I'm … rethinking."

"A thing that involves dancing."

"The Sterling Ball."

"That sounds like something you'll hate," Beverly said.

“Yeah.”

“So why are you going? Did he guilt you into it?”

“No. Not really.” They moved to the music for a few more seconds, and then he let himself admit it: “It’d make him happy, that’s all.”

Beverly stared at him. “That is … really sweet. Which is not normally a word I’d use to describe you.” She shook her head. “Okay. Who’s going to lead?”

“I am,” Will said. “This is hard enough without trying to do it backward.”

*

Several weeks later, the suit was ready. His dancing was at least competent if not spectacular. He hadn’t stepped on Beverly’s toes since the second lesson.

Hannibal had never asked where he went one night a week or why he came back smelling of perfume. Will wondered if he’d guessed somehow or if he was just trying to allow Will some amount of privacy. Which, frankly, seemed unlikely.

“So this thing you wanted me to go to,” Will said one night when they were cooking together. “It’s soon, isn’t it?”

“This weekend.”

“Did you find someone else to go with?”

Hannibal paused in mincing garlic and then set his knife in motion again. “I didn’t ask anyone else.”

“You can if you want. I won’t be upset.”

Hannibal looked at him flatly, knife still moving, snugged up against his knuckles. “You would.”

“I’d pretend not to be,” Will offered.

“I don’t want to go with anyone else.”

“Okay,” Will said, pleased and trying not to show it.

*

The night of the party, Will showered and dressed in the suit Mr. Pell had made for him. It was a dark gray three-piece, the waistcoat so aggressively fitted that Will felt like he was wearing a corset. He put on the aftershave that Hannibal had given him, pushed at his hair until it stayed out of his face, and set out for Baltimore.

The Sterling Ball was being held at someone's massive old stone manor house. Will pulled up to the door in his Volvo. The valet gave him a worried look.

A harried looking blonde woman strode toward him with a pasted-on smile and a clipboard. Will gave her his name before she could ask. He was on the list. He'd thought he might be. If not, the plan had been to sneak in through the garden. This was easier.

Inside, someone took his coat, and he walked through the vaulted foyer into the main room. The roar of conversation filled up the space. It was just a little too warm from all the bodies in close proximity, too bright from the half dozen crystal chandeliers, too full of refracted images and echoes. He wanted to turn around and walk out again.

Instead, he climbed the stairs to the mezzanine level that overlooked the room and spotted Hannibal near some painting. He had a knot of admirers around him. Will made his way back down and across the room. He stopped when he got there, hand raised, just short of touching Hannibal's shoulder. Frozen.

In that second, everything he'd done seemed like too much, much too much, and he wanted to find an exit as quickly as possible so he could pretend none of it had ever happened.

A woman looked at him over Hannibal's shoulder. "Hannibal? I believe this young man is trying to get your attention."

Hannibal turned toward him. His face changed, going soft and open and then almost awed as he looked Will up and down. "You came."

"You wanted to dance."

Hannibal took his still-raised hand in both of his. "This is a new suit," he said.

"I didn't want to embarrass you."

"That's not possible."

"Hannibal?" It was the same woman, older than Hannibal with dark hair and a shimmering dress. "Are you going to introduce us?"

"My apologies." Hannibal named the people in his little circle, all of whom Will promptly forgot because then Hannibal kissed his hand and said, "And this is Will Graham."

And this was clearly not the first time they'd heard his name. Hannibal had talked about him to these people, his friends, or at least his acquaintances. It was oddly shocking, and he didn't really know why.

Hannibal drew him away toward the open bar after that and got him a glass of whiskey. "You look shellshocked already," he said.

"What did you tell them about me? I don't — sorry. I didn't mean that to sound like that. I just don't know what you would've said."

“I have spoken of you now and then. Enough, I suppose, that they know your name and your profession. You are a part of my life.”

Will looked up at him. For a moment, everything went still and calm around him and in his head. “I want to be part of your life.”

Hannibal smiled at him. “Shall we dance?”

“I only know how to lead.”

“I am happy to follow you.”

They stepped out onto the dance floor, Will’s hand on his back, Hannibal’s on Will’s shoulder. It didn’t feel like dancing with Beverly. It didn’t feel like dancing at all. It felt like their conversations did: sometimes difficult, sometimes easy, sometimes the best thing in the world.

“You have gone to a great deal of trouble to make sure I didn’t dance with anyone else,” Hannibal said in his ear.

“Did you know I was taking lessons?”

“I wasn’t certain. The floor wax typically used in studios has a certain scent, but I did not want to make assumptions.” He paused, thumb sliding along the side of Will’s neck. “You don’t owe me an apology.”

“That’s not what this is.”

“What is it?”

Will shrugged. “You wanted me here.”

“And?”

“And I like giving you what you want.”

Hannibal leaned close until they were dancing cheek to cheek. “When we get home, I’d like to give you something in return.”

*

They left the party early, after dinner and more dancing, but before the speeches and awards. Hannibal drove them back to his house. “Will the dogs be all right without you?”

“I’ve got someone staying with them.”

Hannibal’s face slid into a sleek, pleased expression. “Good.”

When they arrived, he led Will directly upstairs without turning on the lights. Will reached for the light switch in the bedroom, but Hannibal vetoed that as well.

“Come here,” he said. He led Will to the bench at the end of his bed. “Sit.”

Will sat. Hannibal took off his shoes and knelt behind him. Will could see both of them reflected dimly in the mirror above the fireplace. He shifted, remembering how it had felt to watch the two of them together, Hannibal over him and between his legs. They hadn’t gone any further that day.

Hannibal slid his hands under’s Will’s suit jacket and over the fitted curve of the waistcoat. “This is very nice,” he said.

“I wouldn’t mind having it off.”

“I quite like it on.” But Hannibal did tug the jacket down Will’s shoulders and off. He unbuttoned Will’s shirt collar and removed his tie. He breathed into the hollow of Will’s throat. “You did this for me.”

Will tipped his head back, eyes closing. “Yeah.”

“A gift for me to unwrap.”

“Better hurry up or I’ll unwrap myself.”

“No,” Hannibal said. “You won’t. Will you?”

Probably not. He had a feeling he was going to give Hannibal anything he wanted tonight. He watched them blend together in the mirror, shadow against shadow, Hannibal’s hands dark against the white shirt and then pale on the dark gray waistcoat.

He thumbed at the line of black buttons but didn’t undo them. Instead, he reached down to spread Will’s thighs. “Lean back against me,” he said.

Will did, hands on Hannibal’s knees, legs falling easily open.

“You liked watching us before I think.”

“I liked watching you,” Will said.

“And I like watching you.” Hannibal pressed a kiss to the corner of his jaw and then set his lips to Will’s neck. He laid a hand between Will’s legs as he started to suck.

Will watched him in the mirror, his bent head, hair still slicked tightly back. The subtle movements. And then Will looked at himself, as he was no doubt meant to. He could see nothing with clarity but he could see enough, especially when Hannibal unzipped his pants and freed his cock.

Will shifted and breathed through his nose, lips pressed tight together. He was getting hard fast. From Hannibal’s mouth on him, from his proximity, from watching them both. He slid a hand back into Hannibal’s hair to hold him in place.

“Is there something you want, Will?”

“Plenty of things.”

“Tell me.”

Will swallowed. “Will you suck me?”

Hannibal smiled against his skin. “On the floor between your legs?”

Will could see it too vividly. “Naked,” he said.

And then he got to watch as Hannibal rose and stood in front of him and began to undress. Hannibal unknotted his tie and slid it free. He let it fall to the floor where it lay in a heap, silk gleaming faintly in the dark. He unbuttoned his shirt at a steady pace, and he he held Will’s gaze as he did. His face was solemn, his eyes entirely black and surrounded by wells of shadow like the eye sockets of a skull.

Will watched the way moonlight glanced off his angles. When Hannibal was down to nothing but skin, the paler parts of him were silvered and so was his hair. He knelt between Will’s legs and leaned forward, face buried in the join between Will’s thigh and hip as he inhaled.

Will touched his hair and guided him over until Hannibal licked at his cock and then took it all at once into his mouth. Will had felt warm enough before, but Hannibal’s mouth was fire. He swallowed Will down and sucked him, and Will thought of Hannibal’s drunken confession that he’d thought of consuming him. Will felt consumed.

His hands wound through Hannibal’s hair and gripped tight. His thighs shook. He tried to spread his legs wider. His chest and stomach heaved against the waistcoat. He could feel each one of the buttons, the constriction of fabric, the pull of the suit pants, his new shoes sliding on the floor.

Hannibal looked up at him. Will pulled a hand away from his hair to cup his cheek. Hannibal leaned into his palm, put a hand on his knee, and took Will all the way into his throat.

Will froze for a second, looking down at him and the image he presented like a lightning strike in a storm, and then he was tipping over the edge without the chance or even ability to get out a warning. His mouth was open, but he couldn’t make a sound. Every muscle contracted, seizure-tight.

When it was over, he fell back onto the bed. Hannibal crawled up onto the bench to straddle his lap. He pulled Will up to him and kissed him. Will wrapped clumsy arms around his neck and held him and was held in return.

Hannibal’s cock was pressed against Will’s stomach, sliding over fabric and smearing against it. Will closed his hand around it. Hannibal tipped his head back and took a harsh breath. “What do you want?” Will asked him.

In response, Hannibal pushed him flat and pulled open two sets of buttons until he could get his cock against Will’s skin. He rubbed it over Will’s stomach and stared down at him.

Will put a hand around his wrist and squeezed, encouraging. “Whatever you want. It’s okay,” he said.

Hannibal made a tiny, pained noise. He jerked himself off rapidly, almost silent. He closed his eyes and bared his teeth as he came, and he didn’t look at Will as he rubbed the mess over Will’s stomach and into his skin with both hands.

Will could hear his breath. He pulled at Hannibal’s shoulders until they were lying flush together. In the mirror, they looked like one misshapen creature.

“Thank you for tonight,” Hannibal murmured.

Will wanted to make a joke of it. *If this is the reaction I get—* But he couldn’t. “You’re welcome,” he said.

hannibal meets will's father

Will woke in Hannibal's bed, flopped over Hannibal's chest like a landed fish. His phone was ringing shrilly on the bedside table. He expected it to be Jack calling to drag him out into the night, but the clock said it was after ten in the morning, and he didn't recognize the number.

"Hello?"

"Where are you at, Willy? I'm at your work. They won't let me in the gate."

Will sat up straight. "I'm in Baltimore. You're here?"

"That brain of yours slowed down since I talked to you last?"

"No, sir. I -- do you want to meet me in Wolf Trap?" He was already out of bed and picking his clothes up off the floor.

"No, I'll come to you. Unless you're working. It can wait."

Lie, Will told himself, but it was too late. "No, I'm not working."

There was a pause as his father did not ask what Will was doing on ten on a Tuesday if not working. He didn't believe in days off. "What's the address?"

Will gave it to him, hung up, and sat down hard on the side of the bed.

Hannibal curled around him and stroked his back. "Your father?"

"That obvious?"

"You do look mildly panicked."

"He never comes to visit. Once the whole time I've lived up here." Will stared at Hannibal's Japanese armor. It stared back at him. He had to shower. If his hair was wet, it would be obvious that he'd slept here. It would be obvious anyway. He should've told his dad to find a Starbucks and wait for him. Shit. He could call back.

Hannibal was watching him expectantly. He couldn't call back. He couldn't ask Hannibal not to say anything. He was going to have to introduce Hannibal as his boyfriend, and he had no idea how that was going to go.

"Shall I make coffee?" Hannibal said.

Will pictured his father's reaction to Hannibal's coffee setup. He nodded anyway. "Please. A lot."

"Is your father homophobic?" Hannibal asked.

Will shoved his hair back out of his face. "No. It's not that. But we never talked about it. Hell. There was nothing to talk about."

"Do you think he'll be upset?"

"We'll find out," Will said.

Hannibal gave him a long look. "Take your shower. Even if it goes badly, worse things have happened in the history of the world."

"I know. It's fine. It'll be fine. I just didn't want to do it this way."

"This is the way we're doing it."

Will still wasn't used to being part of a 'we,' but right now he was grateful for it.

*

He felt slightly better by the time he came downstairs. Hannibal was in the kitchen, wearing slacks and a sweater and looking fairly casual for him. He handed Will a cup of coffee and Will pulled him closer for a kiss.

"Sorry I panicked," Will said.

"Family has that effect on many people."

"Yeah." He couldn't settle. He wandered the kitchen and got in Hannibal's way and drank two cups of coffee like they were shots.

"Will." Hannibal took the third cup from his hand and replaced it with toast. "Sit down. Eat that."

"I'm fine," Will said. He sat down and tore off a strip of crust. "I just don't know why he's up here."

"You're concerned."

"Both his parents died of cancer. He wouldn't want to tell me something like that on the phone."

"You don't think it's more likely that he simply wanted to see you?" Hannibal said.

"Out of the blue? After seven years?"

The doorbell rang. "That can't be him yet," Hannibal said.

"You don't know how he drives. It's a miracle I lived to grow up." Will headed for the door, Hannibal trailing behind. He opened it.

His father had his hands on his hips, standing back from the doorway to stare up at Hannibal's house. "Some place," he said. He stuck his hand out to Hannibal. "Beau Graham."

"Hannibal Lecter. It's a pleasure to meet you. Please come in."

That was the introductions taken care of, and Will hadn't even had time to wonder whether 'boyfriend' was the right word to use or not. Hannibal moved them all smoothly back to the kitchen, poured another round of coffee, and set a plate of croissants pointedly close to Will's elbow. Will's father eyed the Frankensteinian coffee set up with the expression Will had expected, but Hannibal cut him off at the pass by explaining how it all worked. Beau Graham would listen to technical explanations of any sort of new machinery while the world fell down around his ears.

"How much did that set you back?" he said when Hannibal was done.

"About a thousand dollars."

Will nearly choked on his croissant, but his dad just drained the rest of his coffee. "Might be worth it," he said.

Hannibal excused himself shortly after that to make a fictitious phone call and left Will and his father alone in the kitchen.

"You two are together," his dad said.

Will nodded.

"Were you gonna tell me?"

"Still getting used to it myself," Will said.

"Was that a Christmas tree made out of antlers in the front room?"

"Sure looks like it," Will admitted.

"Son, it's February."

Will smiled down at his coffee. His dad was doing the same. Apparently he'd been panicking for nothing, at least about introducing him to Hannibal. "It's good to see you. Everything okay?"

He was quiet long enough for every worry to respawn in Will's mind. "I'm selling the house," he said finally. "I know you put it in my name, but you paid for it. You ought to know."

Will looked up and stared. "Is that all?"

"Is that all. That ain't enough?"

"I thought you were dying," Will said. He leaned against the counter. "Fuck. Dad."

"Don't let your fancy boyfriend hear you talk like that."

"He's not as uptight as he seems," Will said. He'd said it to Beverly so many times that it was automatic now.

"Yeah, don't see how he could be. Good coffee though."

"Dad. Did you really drive all the way up here just to tell me you're selling the house?"

"Well. Sold it already, truth to tell. Bought an RV," his dad said. "Parked it down the street. Want to see?"

"Yeah, of course. Let me tell Hannibal where we're going."

His dad nodded and walked off. "Meet you out there. Turn left at the gargoyle."

"Not funny," Will called after him, but he was smiling to himself as he walked down the hall to Hannibal's study.

Hannibal was reading on the sofa. He set his book aside when Will came in. "Is everything all right?"

Will leaned over the back of the sofa and put his arms around Hannibal's neck. "Everything's good. He's fine. He sold the house and bought an RV. I'm about to get a tour. It'll probably last at least an hour."

"Will you invite him for dinner?"

"Can you cook at my house? I told the dogsitter I'd be home by afternoon."

"Of course. I'll walk you out. I need to get a few things at the store."

"Nothing too fancy," Will said.

"I understand," Hannibal said, in a bland tone that suggested intricately carved fruit and tableside flambes.

They walked out together. The RV was parked in front of Hannibal's neighbor's driveway, blazing in cream, red, and chrome. His dad lifted a hand, and Will waved back. "Sure you don't want the tour?" he asked Hannibal.

"I am, thank you. Shall I meet you at your house this evening? I imagine you two will want the day together."

"Sounds good." Will leaned in and kissed him, slow and deliberate. "Thank you," he said.

Hannibal held him close for a moment. "It's no trouble. I'm glad I had the opportunity to meet him."

"I'm glad too."

Hannibal kissed him once more and opened the car door. "Have a good day, Will. I love you."

He said it like it was the thousandth time instead of the first. He said it so casually that he was in the car and pulling out of the drive by the time the words registered. Will stared after him for a few seconds, but his dad was waving to him impatiently from the RV. Will walked toward him in a daze, heart pounding, almost painfully happy.

dinner with dad

Hannibal was already at Will's house by the time Will and his father got there.

"You gave him a key?" his dad said.

"Yeah. He watches the dogs for me sometimes."

"He give you a key?"

Will looked at him. "Yeah, Dad. He gave me a key."

"This serious then?"

Will thought serious didn't begin to cover it, especially after that bomb Hannibal had dropped so casually this morning. "I guess so," he said.

"Does he fish?"

"What do you think?"

His dad made a grumpy sound in his throat. "Sure you want to end up with someone who doesn't fish?"

"Not sure I have much choice. You want to see the barn? I've got a couple of engines out there I've been working on."

They went out to the barn. Will showed him the engines, including the big one he'd bought recently that would go in a sailboat he had his eye on. It was sitting in dry dock with no engine and a hole in the hull, but it was fixable.

"This fancy boyfriend of yours—" his dad started.

"Is that what you're gonna call him from now on?"

His dad gave him a look that said quite clearly: yes. "What's he do?"

"He's a psychiatrist."

Silence. His dad picked up part of a piston and examined it.

"He was my psychiatrist. For a while."

Still nothing.

"That's how we met," Will said.

His father just looked at him.

“He used to be a surgeon.”

“Doctors and head-shrinkers. Your favorite. And he don’t fish.”

“I like him,” Will said.

His dad polished the piston on his shirt tail, smiling. “Guess you must.”

*

They spent more time in the barn than Will had counted on and both of them looked up in surprise when they heard Hannibal at the door. The sun was behind him. He wore an apron that he must have brought from home, suit jacket gone, Will’s gray sweater pulled on over his shirt. Will thought he looked good enough to eat and almost said so.

“Dinner is almost ready,” Hannibal said.

His father whistled as they walked into the house. “Smells all right in here. What are you cooking?”

“Crawfish bisque to start, crab-stuffed catfish fillets with a Cajun rémoulade, and an okra and corn maque choux. With beignets for dessert,” Hannibal said.

Beau Graham expressed doubt with a minimum of facial movement. Will didn’t bother reassuring him. The food sounded overelaborate to him too, but it always did, and it was always good. Hannibal was maybe trying a little hard tonight, but that only made Will smile helplessly at him from behind his father’s shoulder as they washed their grease-stained hands at the kitchen sink.

Everyone sat down to dinner on their best behavior. Will’s father made no comments about fancying up good southern cooking. Hannibal skipped his pre-dinner speech since he’d laid out the menu already and said only: “Bon appétit.”

The first minute or two passed in silence, which, in Will’s experience, was normal for Hannibal’s meals. You needed to take a second to get used to food that tasted that good.

“Not bad,” Will’s dad said.

Hannibal seemed to understand that it was meant as high praise. He nodded in thanks. “I understand you plan to travel. Where will you go?”

“West. Haven’t hardly been west of Chicago. That’s more than half the country. Might head up to Canada too. Who knows.”

Will started to relax slightly. He’d been worried that, as the single common point between them, he’d end up as the topic of conversation, but travel was good. Travel was safe.

“I haven’t seen much of the country out there myself,” Hannibal said. “California, of course, and skiing in the Rockies, but very little in between.”

“Willy’s been skiing. Went with some girl in college. Snapped his leg like a twig and didn’t even tell me.”

Well. That lasted all of ten seconds. “I was fine, Dad.”

Hannibal gave Will a look that Will could translate with zero effort: *Did you tell him about the encephalitis?* Will looked back: *No, and neither will you if you know what’s good for you.* Hannibal’s return volley was a slow blink, noncommittal and worrying.

“Sure you were,” his dad said. “Never went skiing again though, did you?”

“Perhaps we can do something about that,” Hannibal said.

Will’s father nodded, satisfied. “Well, you can take a hint. That’s something.”

Will closed his eyes briefly. “Dad.”

“It’s your fault for never bringing anyone home. I never got a chance to embarrass you in front of your—“ He’d meant to say ‘girl’; Will could tell, but he switched gears without too much grinding. “—sweetheart before.”

Sweetheart. It could’ve been worse. Even so, Will didn’t dare look at Hannibal. “Don’t feel you need to make up for lost time,” he said.

“Might not be able to help it. You know what a talker I am.”

Will nearly choked on his bisque.

“That must be where Will gets it from,” Hannibal said. “There are times I can hardly get a word in edgewise.”

Will’s father laughed at, genuine and loud. “If I had a damn nickel for every time his teachers asked me why he never spoke up in class …”

It went better after that. Hannibal could probably keep a conversation going if half the participants were dead, and Will’s father seemed to enjoy himself to an extent. Over beignets — freshly fried, of course — and coffee, he told Hannibal it was the best meal he’d had since he left Louisiana.

Hannibal was pleased in his understated way, and Will’s father more or less mirrored the expression. Watching them both, Will realized that they were more alike than he’d thought. Maybe that shouldn’t have come as such a surprise. He smiled into his coffee and breathed in the scent of chicory and home.

Buster came over to look winsomely up at them, just on the acceptable side of begging. “You’re too late,” Will’s dad said. “Should’ve come earlier if you wanted the catfish.”

“He wants the beignets,” Will said. “He likes fried dough. Don’t give him any. It’s bad for him.”

Will's father ignored him, but it was just a little pinched off piece, and Buster's tail wagged so hard he nearly fell over. "You remember that dog you had when you were a kid?"

"Fox wasn't really mine," Will said. "Just a stray. I fed her when I could."

"And let her sleep in the back of the truck so we accidentally drove off with her when we left for Georgia." Will's father paused. "She was a good dog. Still sorry we had to leave her at the shelter."

"I know. It's okay, Dad."

The mood dipped. Everyone drank coffee. Buster was still gumming his tiny bite of beignet.

"Have I told you about my horse?" Hannibal said.

"When did you have a horse?" Will asked.

"My family owned him when I was a child. When I lost them, I thought I had lost him as well, but when I arrived at the orphanage, he waiting for me. He was there to work, of course, but he was still popular with the children. He could carry three at once. Four if they were very small. I stole apples from the kitchen for him."

It didn't exactly lift the mood, but it mellowed until the silence around the table became easier. Eventually, Will's father announced that he was going to bed. "I'll sleep in the RV. Willy, you walk me out."

Will did, and the dogs accompanied them for their last run of the day. Will had expected his father to have something else to say, presumably about Hannibal. He waited, but his father just put a hand on his shoulder as they stood and watched the dogs.

"Doing all right?" he said after a while.

Will nodded. "Yeah, actually. Pretty good."

"That's good. I'm glad. Real glad." He squeezed Will's shoulder and gave him a smile and then he went into the RV and closed the door.

Will whistled for the dogs and walked back to the house. Hannibal was drying the last of the dishes. Will leaned against his back.

"Do I meet with his approval?" Hannibal said.

"I think so. At least he's reserving judgement till he knows you better. He's leaving in the morning."

"Shall I make breakfast?"

"You don't mind staying?" Will asked.

"I want to."

“To be clear, we’re not having sex unless you feel like moving the bed into a room with a door on it first. I know he’s got a toilet and everything in the RV, but stuff happens, and that’s not a risk I’m willing to take.”

Hannibal turned and kissed his forehead. “I still want to.”

“What you said this morning—“ Will stopped. He could still hear it. *I love you.* He’d been hearing it all day.

“Shall I say it again?” Hannibal asked.

“I can’t—“

“It doesn’t matter.” And he really looked like it didn’t matter. He looked happy, like Will made him happy, even frozen and awkward as he was.

Will pulled him close and shook his head. “Not now.”

“All right. But I do.”

Will smiled to himself. “Always have to have the last word, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Hannibal said.

florence

Will had left Hannibal asleep in their hotel room and gone out walking near dawn. For a while, it helped. The wet chill in the air and the city smells and a near miss with a delivery van all suggested that this was not, in fact, an extended pleasant hallucination.

He walked until his feet ached, until the misty dawn gave way to blazing blue overhead, until hunger reminded him both that he hadn't eaten since dinner and that he hadn't left Hannibal a note. He'd expected to be back before breakfast, and it was now nearly ten.

He checked his phone and found only one text, a photo of the Uffizi.

It took him about twenty minutes to get there and nearly as long to get in and find Hannibal. He was seated in front of a painting with a sketchbook open on his lap. Will looked over his shoulder and saw a perfect copy of the painting done in pencil.

"You found me," Hannibal said. "How was your walk?"

"Long. Sorry. I should've said I was going out."

Hannibal shook his head. "I was happy enough to spend the morning here."

"Not the first morning you've spent here."

"No. This painting has always drawn me."

Will sat beside him. "You're not the only one. There was a serial killer who posed his victims like those two."

"Il Mostro, yes. I was here when he was killing. It was a newspaper photograph of those doomed lovers that sent me here. I wanted to see the original."

"How many times have you drawn it?"

"I couldn't say. I had sketchbooks full of little else. There was a policeman who suspected me of the murders on that basis alone."

"It would look a little suspicious," Will said.

"But of course there was no other evidence. The investigation moved on. The city was good to me. Florence was where I became a man."

Will snorted. "You know what that sounds like, right?"

Hannibal brushed a speck of graphite dust off of his sketch and sniffed. "Sex was not involved."

"Well?"

“You must be hungry. Let’s find something to eat.”

They left the dense gloom of the Uffizi and its walls crowded with the art of centuries. Outside, in the sun, Hannibal stopped and looked across the square. “I didn’t speak Italian at the time. I had finished school and had no job or other occupation. Nothing with which I was required to fill my time. It was an isolating experience.”

“Was that good or bad?”

“It was neither. Or both. I had a great deal of time to think.”

“Dangerous.”

“Often, yes.”

Hannibal led them out of the square, down one street, through an alley, and into a small cafe. The man behind the counter gave them two espressos without being asked. They stood looking out into the bright morning as they drank.

Hannibal finished his first and set the cup down. “I had never been alone before. Alone in my head, yes, always. But never without the pressure and presence of family or schoolmates. It was an alignment of interior and exterior that I had never known. Equilibrium.”

“I think that’s what I was looking for this morning,” Will said. “This – all of this seemed too good to be true.”

“And so you sought out the familiar. Exhaustion and solitude. Was it helpful?”

“No. Sort of. Made me realize why it wasn’t helpful, at least.”

“And why was that?”

“I’m not that used to solitude anymore.” Will drained his espresso and caught Hannibal’s pleased expression out of the corner of his eye.

“No. Nor am I.”

“Thank you for bringing me here,” Will said. “For showing it to me.”

“I’m glad you agreed to come. Finally.”

“I said I’d go. I had to wait until classes were over.”

“And then for the next case and the next.”

Will elbowed him gently. “Okay. We’re here, aren’t we?”

“We are.” Hannibal rested a hand on his back as they let the cafe. “It has been strange for me as well. To have found this so late, against all expectation. To have found you.”

Will leaned into the touch briefly before Hannibal let his hand fall away. “Romantic.”

“Shouldn’t I be? I love you, Will.”

It wasn’t the first time he’d said it, but it still left Will with the sensation of plunging from a great height, dangerous and thrilling. “I know,” he said, which was the only reply he’d managed so far.

Hannibal never seemed to mind. His eyes were warm and fond. He kissed Will in the middle of the empty street, in this foreign city, and it felt like coming home.

florence & the motorcycle

"Perhaps a trip into the countryside," Hannibal had said. Will had agreed, face-down in a mound of fluffy hotel pillows and already half asleep. The brief exchange had not prepared him for Hannibal's inexplicable enthusiasm the next morning. Now it was half past eight, and he was unwillingly awake, squinting into the sun outside the hotel while he waited for Hannibal and their transportation.

Some guy on a midnight blue motorcycle with matching leathers roared up and skidded to a showy stop practically on top of him. Will frowned at him, but he'd been frowning before due to lack of coffee, so it probably didn't make much of an impression.

The guy turned toward him and took off his helmet. Will's early-morning crankiness slid off his face and dripped onto the pavement. Hannibal smiled at him and pushed a hand back through his hair. "Do you like it?" he said.

"This is what got you out of bed so goddamn early." Will circled the bike, looking it and him over and trying hopelessly not to linger on the curve of Hannibal's ass in tight blue leather. "Are the rental places even open?"

"Not as such," Hannibal said. He presented Will with a helmet. "There's a jacket for you in the pannier."

"Not as such." Will circled back around to the front and leaned in over the handlebars. "Hannibal. Did you buy this thing?"

Hannibal was smiling at him. He stole a kiss before he answered. "I had one the last time I was here. It occurred to me that you might enjoy it. Buying gives one more freedom than renting. We might go anywhere."

"We might get on a plane in three days. Given that we've got return tickets."

Hannibal raised one hand, palm up. "We might. Or we might not. We might do anything we wish."

Will was smiling back, helpless to do anything else. "And what are we doing today?"

"I thought we might visit Cinque Terre. We can have lunch before we go back. Or before we go on."

"Go on without any luggage? Or even a toothbrush?"

"They do sell such things even in the vast wilderness of the Tuscan countryside," Hannibal said, almost perfectly serious. He leaned across the handlebars for another kiss, but someone behind them honked and the hotel valet was making polite gestures for them to at least pull up out of the way.

Will put on the jacket. It was a rich reddish brown, and he was a little relieved it didn't match Hannibal's as he'd suspected it might. He swung his leg over the bike and pulled on the helmet.

The engine purred back to life. Hannibal wove them neatly into the morning traffic. The city around them was still a dreaming rose-gold in the early light. Will put his arms around Hannibal's waist and imagined they could keep going forever.

cinque terre

Chapter Notes

> This is based off my own memory of the cliff walk there, so it might not be super accurate because I was pretty young when I visited. I think you actually have to pay to do it now, so you probably can't go wandering up there at night, but let's say you can, because *romance.*

They spent the day on the motorcycle, stopping to eat or wander through small towns. The road twisted through open countryside, green with winter rain, and they didn't make it to Monterosso al Mare until dinner. Hannibal left the motorcycle in an unpaved parking lot and led Will to a small restaurant. They had polenta and whole fried shrimp and fresh pasta, and even Hannibal didn't have a bad word to say about it.

Afterward, they walked in wavering moonlight over cobblestone streets. A trio of old men sat on a bench, all smoking, and the smoke rose up until it vanished into the dark.

"In the morning, we can walk along the cliffs," Hannibal said.

They stood at the edge of the town. Will looked down the sheer drop-off into the sea. Water lapped at the base of the rock. "Where does the path go?"

"The closest town is Vernazza. There are three more if we carry on. In total, about seven miles. You can see the path if you look up."

Hannibal pointed, and Will followed the gesture. He could just see a pale line that wound up toward the top of the cliffs and then vanished like the smoke. "We haven't checked into a hotel yet," Will said.

"No, we haven't. What are you considering?"

"We could go now. Walk to the next town. It's not that late."

"It's not the easiest path, even in daylight." Hannibal paused. "We ought at least to have a flashlight."

"I've got a flashlight app on my phone." Will glanced sideways at Hannibal and found him smiling, soft and fond. "Bad idea, huh?" Will said.

"Very likely." Hannibal took his arm and led him toward the cliff path.

The moon was bright enough, between scudding clouds, to see shadows of the world around them. The path was wide enough for them to walk side by side until it started to climb. It

narrowed within the space of a few yards to a rut in the dirt studded with occasional stones. The cliffs rose above the town, and the path rose too.

Will stopped as the path leveled out. The silhouette of an olive tree and a couple of leaning pines stood against the sky. Far below, moonlight caught the tops of the waves. Everything smelled like salt and dry earth. “How far is it?” Will said.

“About two miles. Not a long walk, but it will be slow going in the dark.”

“Maybe this is far enough,” Will said.

He sat down at the edge of the path so that his feet hung down into empty space. Hannibal sat beside him. A chill wind blew off the sea, and Will was happy to lean into Hannibal’s warmth.

“What is this far enough for?” Hannibal asked.

Will shook his head. He didn’t quite know. He took Hannibal’s hand in both of him, one cupping it from underneath and one running over the lines on his palm. “I got a postcard from my dad before we left.”

“How is he?”

“Good. He’s going up to Canada. Nunavut. He wants to see moose. He said he’d stop by on his way back.”

“I shall look forward to it.”

Will turned to look at his darkened profile. “You really will, won’t you?”

“I liked him. He reminded me of you. And he sent me a picture of you as a child.”

“Oh God,” Will said. “Which one?”

“You were six or seven, I think. Very small. Holding a fish. Smiling. One of your front teeth was missing.”

Will smiled a little. “I’m not surprised he picked that one. He can’t believe I ended up with someone who doesn’t fish.”

“Have you? Ended up with me?”

Will tilted his head to kiss Hannibal’s jaw. Hannibal put an arm around him, and Will pressed closer. “Looks like. Doesn’t it?”

“It does look that way at the moment, yes.”

Will stared out into the dark, suddenly feeling the void beneath them. “I — I want it to be more than that. More than just for now.”

Hannibal had been rubbing circles into Will's shoulder with his thumb. He paused. "How long would you like it to be?"

Will swallowed hard. "Forever? I don't — I wasn't planning this. I don't have a ring, but if I did—" He stopped, heart loud in his ears.

Hannibal was perfectly still for a moment and then he put both arms around Will and crushed him close. "Yes," he said. "Yes. Yes."

Will hugged him back, clinging, eyes closed tight. "I love you. I've been trying to say it."

"You didn't have to. I know. I have known."

"I did have to. Sorry it took me so long."

They stayed there, wrapped up in each other, on a cliff above the sea, until the moon had dropped low enough to touch the water. When they started back toward the lights of the town, they walked hand in hand, despite the narrow path.

flight home

Chapter Summary

> This is their flight home from Italy, which I just now realized that I never posted here. Sorry!

Hannibal slept on the fight back from Italy. Will stared out the window at the pale shadows of clouds in the night sky, and thought. They were getting married. He'd have to tell his dad. Since he had no idea where his dad was, that might be a problem. No cell phones for Beau Graham. Unnecessary, a waste of money, and a pernicious invasion of his privacy.

I don't want to be out watching a damn sunset and my ass starts ringing. I'll be fine. Or I won't. Maybe I'll die. Everyone goes sometime. Will was going to be forty next year. He was no better at arguing with his father than he had been when he was four.

He looked over at Hannibal and saw that his eyes were half open. He looked just barely awake.

"We're not there yet," Will said.

"Your consideration of the clouds looked serious."

"I was thinking about how to get in touch with Dad. I think we'll just have to wait till he gets back. Hope you're not in a hurry."

"You will want him there for the ceremony, I assume."

"It'd be nice."

Hannibal nodded. "And who else?"

Will tried to think. He and Beverly had gotten a little closer since Hannibal's Christmas party, but it still seemed like it might be weird to invite someone he only knew from work. He shrugged. "I don't really … have friends. I guess. Apart from you."

Hannibal leaned closer until his nose touched Will's cheek. He stayed there, body tilted toward Will's, eyes closed. "Your dogs?"

"At our wedding?"

"If you wish. I'd like to invite Alana."

"That's fine. I like Alana."

“And there is someone else you ought to meet if I can contact her. The only remnant of family I have, though she’s not a blood relation. Her name is Chiyoh. I knew her in France when I lived with my aunt and uncle. We were children together.”

“I’d like to meet her.” Will smiled involuntarily. “Us, three guests, and seven dogs. Hell of a wedding. We could just go to the registry office, you know.”

Hannibal leaned against his shoulder. “I thought an outdoor ceremony. At your house. Or perhaps in the barn in case of rain. I’m sure it could be cleaned out and decorated appropriately.”

“Don’t cover my barn in antlers.”

“We will consider the options together,” Hannibal said primly.

“What about afterward? I hear most married couples live together.”

“If I can remodel your kitchen, I have no objection to moving in with you.”

“Remodel my kitchen, move my bed out of the living room, redecorate the whole place, open up the second floor …”

“You like the idea,” Hannibal said.

“I like the idea of you moving into my life. Yeah.”

“Shall I take your name?”

Will looked down at the top of Hannibal’s head. “Are you serious?”

“I have no particular attachment to my family name. It carries a weight of history that I have spent many years trying to shed. I don’t mind, if it would please you.”

“Do you *want* to?”

Hannibal was quiet for a minute or two. He brushed his thumb across the back of Will’s hand, just short of where a ring might fit on his finger. “I believe I do, yes.”

“You sound surprised.”

“I am, though I don’t know why. Since I met you, all I have wanted is to entangle myself so thoroughly with you that we will never be parted.”

“Still don’t know why, but I’m pretty sure you’ve got what you wanted.”

“You know why,” Hannibal said. “You have felt the same pull, or we wouldn’t be where we are.”

Will kissed his forehead. “You might have a point.”

sick day

The guy behind them on the plane home had spent the last half of the flight trying to hack up his internal organs. Will woke up with a scratchy throat on his first day back to work, which was quickly joined by a sinking feeling in his stomach. He went in anyway.

The first class was all right, but, by lunch time, his throat was raw, his nose was running, and his head hurt as much as it had just before he'd started getting treated for encephalitis. He was almost grateful for the sore throat and sniffles; at least he knew it wasn't a relapse.

Cough drops and coffee got him through his afternoon class and also left him with an astonishingly foul taste in his mouth. He sat at his desk as the students filed out. When they were gone, he slumped back in the chair and closed his eyes. He'd meant to buy groceries after work. He had absolutely nothing in the house except dog food.

Someone knocked on his classroom door. Will looked up. Hannibal hadn't waited for an invitation. He was standing beside Will's desk. Will rubbed his eyes. "Where'd you come from?"

"Where do any of us come from? Random chance, the recombination of ancient molecules, the ineffable spark of consciousness."

"Hannibal."

"I was told you didn't look well."

"By who?"

"I'm afraid I can't reveal my sources." He put a hand to Will's forehead. "A little warm, but not too bad. Come. Let's get you home and into bed."

"I'm fine," Will said. He let Hannibal take his elbow and pull him upright. He did feel warm, a little woozy, and his head throbbed. "I have emails to answer."

"Perhaps in the morning." Hannibal picked up Will's bag and slung it over his own shoulder. "I've called your dog sitter. She doesn't mind resuming her post for another day or two, so I will take you to my house. It will be easier to look after you there."

"I don't need looking after," Will said, but he let Hannibal lead him toward the door. "It's just a cold. Who the hell called you? I haven't even seen anyone but my students today."

"I did give one or two of them my number after my guest lecture."

Will groaned. "They're all getting an extra essay when I get back."

"I can neither confirm nor deny your assumption, of course."

Will rubbed at his head. "Stop sounding so cheerful."

Hannibal leaned over, kissed his temple, and led him out to the car.

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Hannibal's house was warm and it smelled good. All the lights were on. Half of Will's mind echoed with one of his dad's lectures about the electric bill, but the other half was eased by the welcoming glow as evening fell around them.

Hannibal gave him aspirin and water and then nudged him toward the stairs. "A bath will help."

"It's a cold," Will said slowly and distinctly. "You're a doctor. Did they teach you what overkill means at med school?"

Hannibal just chivvied him upstairs and ran the bath for him. "I learned many things in medical school." He poured some kind of oil into the water. It filled the steamy air with a soft scent that Will couldn't place. "None of which are relevant at the moment."

"So what is relevant?"

"Take your clothes off and get in the bath and I'll tell you."

Will rubbed at the back of his neck, which, like his head and several other parts of him, ached. The water looked inviting. "You're never this bossy."

Hannibal just looked at him. Will looked at the tub. His eyes slipped closed as he imagined sinking into it. When Hannibal started unbuttoning his shirt for him, Will batted his hands away and did it himself.

He left his clothes in a pile on the floor and slid into the bath and down until the water touched his lips. He looked up at Hannibal, who sat on the edge of the tub. He put a hand on Will's cheek, and Will leaned into it, eyes nearly closed.

"So what's relevant?" Will mumbled.

"My desire not to see you suffer. And a vow I'll be taking shortly. I believe it includes something about in sickness and in health?"

Will smiled. He couldn't help it. "Are we going traditional then?"

"To have and to hold. To love and to cherish. There is nothing I want more."

Will turned his head and kissed Hannibal's palm.

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Hannibal tucked him into bed after the bath. Will was asleep almost immediately and woke only when Hannibal came up with a tray of chicken soup and toast. He sat up to eat and let Hannibal rearrange his pillows.

“Thanks,” Will said.

Hannibal stroked his hair back from his forehead. “No more complaints or demands for your laptop?”

Will shook his head. “You won this one.”

“And your planned vengeance on your students?”

“I could let it go this once.”

“What brought about this change of heart?”

“You. You want to do this.”

“Very much,” Hannibal said.

Will dipped his toast into the soup. “For better or for worse. I always assume I’ll be on my own for the worse parts.”

“I know.”

Will looked over at him. “But I know I’m not anymore.”

Hannibal gave him a soft look and settled down to sit on the edge of the bed. “Good.”

power outage

Will dreamed of lying in a cold grave. For once, it wasn't a nightmare. No dread touched him, just the frozen earth. A bright blue sky was visible through the rectangular opening of the grave. Frost crept over his hands.

He woke with the pure scent of cold still in his nose and throat. His bed was softer than a grave, but only moderately warmer. Night still clung to the world outside his windows. When he tried to switch on the lamp, nothing happened.

"Will?" Hannibal's sleepy voice.

"Power's out. Stay put."

Will put his feet on the floor and immediately lifted them off of it again to feel for his slippers. With the flashlight on his phone, he found his robe and then he put his coat on over it.

He dug two kerosene lanterns out of the closet and got them going, one on the mantel and one by the bed. By their light, he lit a fire in the fireplace. The dogs crowded around it and nosed at his hands. He gave them a couple of old blankets so they didn't have to lie on the cold floor and then got a couple more for the bed.

By the time, he crawled back between the sheets, his toes were about numb with cold. Hannibal pulled him close.

"Are we sharing body heat?" Will said. "Because I don't think I've got any left. You're better off on your own."

"Never." Hannibal gathered him closer and pulled up the blankets.

Warmth soaked into Will's skin. The clench of his teeth and the shudders deep in his chest eased.

"Aren't you glad I had someone out to clean and repoint your chimney now?" Hannibal said.

Will's mouth twitched with amusement he was not going to show. "You're supposed to ask before you do stuff like that to other people's houses. You do know that, right?"

"We're going to be married. What's yours is mine."

"Uh huh. Usually people say what's mine is yours."

"That as well, of course. I've had the papers drawn up."

"What papers?"

"To put your name on the deeds of my properties and to give you access to my accounts."

Will smiled to himself in the dark space under the covers. He kissed Hannibal's shoulder. "What do I want access to your accounts for? Is that going to stop you repointing my brickwork without permission?"

"Not at all. I've also ordered new appliances for your kitchen."

"Saw that one coming. What'd you get?"

Hannibal told him, in minute detail.

"Really two ovens?" Will said.

"Essential for hosting a dinner party of any size."

"You think your guests will make the trek out here?"

"They'd pay for the privilege. They are still wildly curious about you."

Will considered the drive out from Baltimore, the potholes on his stretch of road, and the kind of cars he'd seen at Hannibal's Christmas party. "Well, that'll get them here once."

"Perhaps I wouldn't mind if it were only once."

"Didn't realize being a social recluse was contagious."

Hannibal combed through Will's hair. "Having become accustomed to a deeper connection, I find that the shallower ones I have pursued are no longer as satisfying."

Will pressed closer, warmed despite himself. "Just going to cook for me then?"

"For the rest of our lives. When it's light, I'll start with breakfast."

The dogs snuffled or snored by the fire. Buster whined at the side of the bed until Will invited him up. It was cold, and Buster was a small dog. Zoe followed, and the two of them curled up at the foot of the bed.

"You really want to move in with me?" Will asked quietly.

"I do. We should move the bed upstairs soon. But after we put in a new bedroom floor. That carpet must go."

"No fireplace up there," Will said. "We'd be cold right now."

"We can have one added."

Will let out a breath of laughter. "Right. You win."

About an hour later when the light had moved from gray to pink with dawn, Hannibal borrowed Will's slippers and lit the gas burners on the stove with a match to cook bacon and eggs and hash browns.

Will shoved his feet into boots and let the dogs out. They left tracks in the frost on the grass.

When breakfast was ready and the dogs had been fed, they ate in bed, close together, Hannibal's arm around Will's shoulders. The power came on halfway through the meal. Will turned off the lanterns and turned on the lights so that the house was as bright and warm as it could be.

They kept the fire going. Will had to admit, although not out loud, that it was nicer than the space heater. The dogs seemed to think so too. All of them now lay in a floppy, drowsy semi-circle around it.

"Okay, fireplace in the bedroom," Will said. "What else?"

"New flooring throughout the second level. Reclaimed wood, I think. The master bath will need work, although the clawfoot tub is acceptable. Quite in keeping with what I have in mind. Perhaps the barn could be converted into a greenhouse…"

Will listened to Hannibal's plans unfold and imagined the sun shining down into the murky interior of his old barn, drawing everything up toward the light.

guest list

They made a guest list. Hannibal insisted. They made it sitting up in Will's bed, shoulder to shoulder. Hannibal had made a tray of bread and cheese and fruit to sustain them. Will was starting to think that wouldn't be enough.

"Really? Jack? You don't think that's weird?"

Hannibal raised his eyebrows. "He's my friend. You know him as well. Surely it would be stranger not to invite him?"

"He's my boss. Sort of. I liked this better when it was just Alana and your friend and my dad."

"If we invite Jack, there's no reason not to invite your friends from work."

"You realize the way you say that is exactly the way my dad used to talk about my "friends" from school? When he shows up, I'll ask him if he can do a Lithuanian accent."

"You are friendly with them. With Agent Katz, at least. They would be your friends, I think. Given the chance."

Will hunched one shoulder in something that wasn't quite denial or agreement. Hannibal was probably right, at least about Beverley. "Is this some therapist thing? Why do you care?"

Hannibal was quiet for a few seconds. He picked up a grape from the tray and set it back in place. "I suppose because I would prefer to keep you to myself."

Will contemplated the grapes as well, for much longer, while he digested that. "I find most people hard to take. Hard to be around. Hard to know who I am when I'm with them. It doesn't feel like that with you. Being with you is better than being alone."

Hannibal took Will's hand in both of his and held it tight.

"But I guess—" Will stopped and thought about whether he really wanted to commit to this. "I guess a few more people wouldn't hurt. If you want."

"Five guests each, perhaps? That would bring us up to an even dozen, which is not too large a number to fit around one table, nor so large that I can't cook for them myself."

Will eyed him. "But no more than that, right? This isn't you working me up slowly to the Four Seasons with a hundred guests and catering staff?"

"I promise you it's not. I'm quite content to have it here. Perhaps we can take a look at your barn today."

"Sure. We can even start cleaning it out if you want. You can borrow an old shirt or something."

Will expected Hannibal to suggest they call a cleaning service. He was even halfway prepared to agree, since he wasn't seriously expecting Hannibal to help. It would be a hell of a job on his own. The barn had been a graveyard of old tools, ancient farm equipment, random junk, and coffee cans full of rusted nuts and bolts and springs and screws when he bought the place. It was worse now. So Hannibal's actual answer caught him off guard.

"I brought appropriate clothing," Hannibal said.

Will glanced sideways at him. "Appropriate for barn cleaning?"

"Yes. I bought jeans."

"You bought jeans."

"Is that so extraordinary?"

Will leaned back against the pillows. "I don't know if it's more extraordinary that you bought them, that you didn't own any already — really not any?"

"Not any."

"Or that I was going to marry a guy who didn't own a single pair of jeans."

Hannibal looked amused. "One less aspect of the wedding for you to worry about."

"Didn't know I needed to worry about it until just now. Let's see them. Go put them on."

Hannibal wore a put upon expression, but he didn't protest as he got up and unpacked his overnight bag onto the foot of the bed. He pulled on clean underwear first and slid the jeans up over his hips. They were dark blue and probably way too expensive to be coated in grime, dust, and cobwebs, but Will wasn't going to tell him to change. He crawled across the bed and kissed him instead.

Hannibal looked pleased. "I presume these are acceptable then?"

Will pulled him down onto the bed and sat straddling his hips, fingers tracing the line of the waistband. Hannibal slid both hands up his bare thighs.

"Acceptable," Will said. "Yeah, I think you'll do."

Hannibal looked up at him, eyes half closed and a tiny smile curving his lips. "What will I do?"

Will moved his hands over Hannibal's chest, up to his shoulders and down his arms. Once he started touching, the temptation was always to keep going, but they'd have time later. "Get a shirt and some trash bags and meet me out there. I need to put the laundry in and feed the dogs."

"Prosaic," Hannibal murmured.

“That’s life. Even you can’t spend all your time playing the harpsichord or listening to opera.”

“I have removed the prosaic and the mundane from my life as much as possible. And made what remained as pleasing as I could. But perhaps there is pleasure to be found in the function of things as well as their form.”

“Does that mean you’ll do the laundry and take out the trash occasionally when you live here?”

Hannibal slid his hands up to Will’s waist and stroked over his hip bones. “I assumed I wouldn’t be given a choice.”

“Well, I know you’ll cook. Couldn’t stop you if I wanted to. So.” Will paused, looking down at Hannibal’s hands on his skin. “I can…you know. I can do the rest. If you want. I don’t mind.”

Hannibal reached up to run a finger along his jaw and over his cheek. “Is that what you want?”

Will leaned into the touch, avoiding Hannibal’s eyes. He hadn’t really thought about it. He’d just assumed he’d be doing most of the work around the house and that had seemed, still seemed, fine. Right. “I want to—“ He made some abortive gesture with his hand.

Hannibal caught it and brought it to his lips. He kissed Will’s knuckles. “What do you want?”

“It’s not like I’d be doing any more than I am now. Less, with you doing the cooking. It’s not a big deal.”

“As fixing my tap wasn’t a big deal. Or buying me a tool box. Or rewiring my lamp, or fixing the dishwasher, or—“

“It’s not a big deal! None of it was. I just want to make sure you’re okay. That you’ve — got everything you need.”

“You want to take care of me.”

Not wanted, needed. Will swallowed and bit at the inside of his lip. It would sound like he thought Hannibal couldn’t manage on his own. Like he thought Hannibal needed him or something. “It’s not like that,” he said.

“Would it be such a great sin if it were like that?”

“Weren’t we going to get dressed and clean out a barn?”

Hannibal pulled him down and rolled them over so that Will was underneath him, warm and pinned in place. He shifted under Hannibal’s weight and got his legs open so that Hannibal settled between them.

“We were.” Hannibal bent and kissed him, lips and nose rubbing softly against his. “We can. But I would like you to know first that nothing you’ve said or carefully avoided saying is upsetting to me. If you want me to help around the house, in addition to the cooking, of course I will. If you don’t, I won’t.”

Will looked up at him in silence for a few seconds. “How do you always make things seem so simple?”

“Most things are simple if one can muster the courage to be honest about them.”

“Then how do you always manage to find the courage?”

Hannibal smiled a little. “I don’t, if you will remember. I could name half a dozen times when you have been forced to drag the truth out of me. But together we manage rather well, don’t we?”

“We’re not bad, I guess.” Will kissed him again. He slid his hands into the back pockets of Hannibal’s jeans. “At most stuff anyway. We’re pretty terrible at getting out of bed.”

“I managed it. You pulled me back in.”

“Not sorry.”

Their next kiss lasted until Daisy started licking Hannibal’s ear. She was the only one of the dogs tall enough to manage it without jumping up on the bed, which they knew wasn’t allowed, and she slurped happily, pleased with herself.

Hannibal twisted his head away and squinted at her. She’d licked his hair up into a point over his ear, and he had visible dog slobber on his jaw as he turned slowly to look at Will.

Will kept a straight face for at least two seconds.

“Perhaps we should look at the second story before the barn,” Hannibal said.

“You think this won’t happen if we have a real bedroom?”

“I think we could shut the door.”

Will smoothed his hair down for him and tried not to laugh. “It’s your own fault they like you. All those sausages.”

Hannibal looked over at Daisy, who had rested her head on the edge of the mattress and was watching him hopefully. He reached over and stroked her ears. “There are worse fates.” He paused. “I thought I might cook for the dogs as well, if you don’t object.”

Will didn’t object, and they didn’t make it out of bed for another hour.

the bet

Shortly after they'd settled the guest list, Will got a call from his father. "I hear congratulations are in order."

Will blinked stupidly at the wall of his office. "You hear from who?"

"This nice girl found me in Rouleau. Says she knows your Hannibal. She's driving down with me."

"Chiyoh?"

"That's her. Quiet. I like her. When's the wedding?"

"I don't know. We were waiting for you."

"Well, I'll be there in about a week, so get on it."

His dad hung up on him. Will called Hannibal.

"Will? What a pleasant surprise."

"Your friend Chiyoh and my dad are carpooling down from Canada. They'll be here in a week."

Hannibal was quiet for a second or two. "That is not what I was expecting you to say."

"What were you expecting me to say?"

"I thought you might have objections to the menu. I sent you an email earlier."

Will opened his email and scrolled down until he found Hannibal's. He read it through. "Well, you're not wrong," he said. "Especially if we've only got a week. When do you think you're gonna find time for all this? And who do you think's going to eat it? We've still only got ten guests."

Hannibal paused. "I confess I am having some trouble choosing."

"The solution to that is not to just make everything."

"Yes, I am aware. It's an unfamiliar dilemma. Making decisions is not usually a problem for me."

"You want help?"

"Perhaps you could tell me what your father would be most likely to enjoy?"

"Sure. We can go over it tonight?"

Hannibal agreed and they said goodbye. Neither of them mentioned whose house they'd meet at. It was nearly always Will's now. Hannibal's stuff was migrating there, bit by bit, one framed bat skull and silk pocket square at a time.

When Will got home that evening, in fact, he was greeted by a full suit of samurai armor on his porch. He stared at it. It stared back at him. He had known at the back of his mind that it would end up here eventually, but he'd thought he might have until after the wedding.

He poked his head through the door, knee in place to keep the dogs inside. "Hannibal? You're not putting this thing in the bedroom, right?"

Hannibal came down the stairs, sleeves rolled up past his elbows and an actual sheen of sweat on his forehead. "I had hoped to have it situated before you got home."

"But not in the bedroom."

It was clear from Hannibal's expression that its destination had indeed been the bedroom, but he changed tack swiftly. "I thought I might take the room over the porch as an office. It can go there."

"Great, fine. You want help carrying it up?"

"If you could occupy the dogs?"

Will threw sticks for them while Hannibal maneuvered it up the stairs.

Hannibal emerged about half an hour later, sweat-free, wearing different clothes, and bearing two cups of coffee. They sat on the porch while the dogs ran around the yard, colored blurs against the vivid green of the grass.

"Where will you put them during the ceremony?" Hannibal asked.

"What do you mean put them?"

"Surely they will interfere if left outdoors, and inside they would eat the food."

"I don't know that I'd trust them alone with a whole duck on the counter, but they can sit on the porch just fine. Or in the barn out of the way."

Hannibal gave him a dubious look.

"How long does it take to say I do? They know how to sit and stay."

"It seems an unnecessary risk."

"Feeding my dad raw fish is an unnecessary risk."

"The sashimi was one option, to go with a Japanese menu. I see it wasn't the best idea. But they could be put upstairs, couldn't they? As you say, it won't be for long."

Will looked at him for a few seconds and then whistled for his dogs. They came bounding and panting onto the porch. He got them all sitting and then turned to Hannibal. “How long? Fifteen minutes? I mean the actual ceremony, not all the blabbing beforehand.”

“Twenty.”

They looked at each other. Will didn’t believe it could possible that that long, but fine. If Hannibal wanted to play it that way. “I’ll make you a bet. They stay put for twenty minutes, I win. If they don’t, you win, and I’ll put them upstairs for the ceremony.”

“What do you get if you win?”

Will rubbed at his chin for a few seconds, palm scraping over stubble, and then he looked up at Hannibal and smiled. “We go fishing on our honeymoon. You, me, a cabin by the lake, a whole lot of fish guts…”

He watched Hannibal’s face simultaneously glow at the mention of their honeymoon and try to remain perfectly blank so as not to show what he thought of the idea of a fishing trip instead of, probably, some castle hopping European art jaunt or a month in Bali.

“Deal?”

Hannibal inclined his head. “I agree to your terms.”

“You sound like you already know you’ll lose.”

“It’s a fair wager. And a convenient one in some ways. I thought I would have to work considerably harder to get you to express an opinion on possible honeymoon destinations.”

Will’s mouth twitched. “Let’s look at the menu. Set the timer on your phone so you’ll know when you lose.”

Twenty minutes later, the timer on Hannibal’s phone started playing Bach. The dogs hadn’t moved. Will got up to feed them. Neither of them mentioned the bet, and Hannibal kept his head down, bent over his menu planning.

the barn

In the end, Will was relieved that they'd decided to invite Beverly, Price, and Zeller to the wedding. It meant that he could accept Beverly's offer to help him clear out the barn without guilt.

He and Hannibal had made a start on it, but Will had been expecting to have more time. His dad and Chiyoh were now three days away, Hannibal was deep in shopping and prep work for the food, and Will still had half a dozen pieces of antique farm equipment where the ceremony was supposed to happen.

Beverly showed up after work with Price and Zeller in tow. Price was dressed the way he was always dressed, but Zeller had gone for ragged jeans and a Mickey Mouse T-shirt. Will had seen both of them at Hannibal's Christmas party, but having them here was different. Dislocating. Zeller seemed to feel the same way, going by his silence and his hands stuck deep in his pockets and his wary posture, which made Will feel slightly better.

Alana showed up a few minutes after they did, and Will led everyone out to the barn.

Beverly looked around in silence for a few seconds. "Wow. I thought you said you'd already started."

"We did. Just didn't get far. We can haul the farm equipment out the with car, but we'll have to clear a path first."

"On it," Beverly said.

She was, and so was everyone else. In about two hours, they had most of it done, and that was despite pauses for Price and Zeller to meet all the dogs — Price with enthusiasm, Zeller with caution — for Will to hook up the car to something that looked like an oversized torture device for corn, and to drink the fresh rosemary lemonade that mysteriously appeared on a table outside the barn in a matched set of glasses that Will knew for certain he didn't own. Hadn't owned. Apparently he owned them now.

Price held his glass up to the fading light and nodded slowly. "I'd marry him just for the lemonade."

"Anybody can make lemonade," Zeller said.

"Not true. It's a delicate balance. Especially when you throw the herbs in. Rosemary's a risky choice. It can go wrong fast."

"Bet you twenty bucks I can make it just as good as he can. Maybe not those — whatever from the Christmas party—" He looked at Will.

"Gonna have to be more specific," Will said.

“Whatever, those cream filled things, I ate like twenty. But lemonade, I can make lemonade, okay?”

“Then I’ll be expecting lemonade,” Price said. He walked back into the barn with the air of man who’d just won something.

Zeller frowned and then hurried after him.

“Is it rude to bet on whether your coworkers are going to hook up?” Beverly said. “Because I don’t care, I’m doing it anyway.”

“No bet,” Alana said.

Will declined as well.

Later, after he’d waved everyone off, Hannibal brought him another glass of lemonade as Will slumped into a chair on the porch.

“How’s it going in there?” Will asked. He hadn’t seen his kitchen since eight that morning, and he wasn’t sure he’d recognize it right now.

“I have done all that I can do for today,” Hannibal said.

“Thanks for the lemonade. Now and before. You didn’t have to. I know you’ve got plenty to do.”

“It’s simple enough, and it made a good distraction from the more complicated dishes. How is the barn?”

“Almost cleared out. It’s just small stuff now, and I’ve got a woman coming by tomorrow who might want the farm equipment.”

Hannibal sat next to Will. His hand hung over the arm of the chair, and Will reached over to hook his forefinger around Hannibal’s.

The sun was almost gone, and the temperature had fallen. It was really too cold to be sitting in the dark drinking ice cold lemonade, but it was the chill of the glass and the sharp wind that brought the moment into focus. Will saw his future summed up in that moment, and he didn’t feel cold at all.

“Three days. Two really, now,” he said.

“Two days,” Hannibal repeated softly.

“Nervous?”

“Disbelieving.”

“Yeah. Me too.”

They sat together until the sun had gone down and all the ice had melted in their glasses.

the wedding

Chapter Notes

> Prompt: *I was wondering if you would write something btwn Freddie & Nice Hannibal? It would be wonderful to see him get snippy with her!*

The RV rumbled to a stop in Will's driveway just after dark the evening before the wedding. Will and the dogs came out to meet it, lifting a hand as his father stepped out into the blue dusk. Leaves paraded in a stiff breeze past his feet. Will's dad bent to scratch Buster's ears and then turned to offer his hand to a woman who appeared behind him in the lit doorway of the RV.

Will reached them as she stepped down. He and the woman looked at each other. Her face was cool and calm. Will was sure his own reflected the twanging of his nerves. She was Hannibal's only remaining family. Nearly Hannibal's only guest, very probably the most important person in his life. Will's stomach clenched tight and edged upward toward his throat.

His dad smacked him between the shoulder blades. "My boy. Will. He can talk, honest. Will, this is Chiyoh. Your Hannibal's sister or somesuch." He glanced at her. "That right?"

"It is a close enough summation, yes."

"Well, you sure sound just like him."

Will finally managed to untick his throat and hold out his hand. "Good to meet you."

Chiyoh took his hand with a delicate touch. "And you. Hannibal has not spoken of me to you."

"Not much."

"Nor you to me. It is not his way."

Will nodded. He picked up Zoe, mostly for something to do with his hands. "He plays it close to the vest. I take it you've got that in common."

She didn't quite smile, but Will recognized the subtle softening of her features. "You could say that. He's inside?"

Will nodded, but the screen door creaked open, and Hannibal emerged. He held out his hands as he walked down the porch steps, and Chiyoh went to meet him. He took her hands in his

and kissed the backs. She said something to him, too softly for Will to catch, and Hannibal replied just as quietly.

Will had about three seconds for a mild creeping jealousy to form before his dad handed him what must be Chiyoh's bag, a dark brown leather duffle with a gold embossed C on the handle.

"Got room for me in the house too? Seems a little cramped after a week of sharing it." Will's dad patted the side of the RV.

"Am I carrying your bag too?"

His dad gave him a look and a gesture to get moving. Will did, nodding to Hannibal and Chiyoh on the way by. Hannibal gave him a warm, if momentary, glance before he turned back to Chiyoh. Which was fair, Will reminded himself. They hadn't seen each other in years. He didn't need to be the center of Hannibal's attention every second.

He'd just gotten used to it, that was all.

He led his dad upstairs and showed him the two guest rooms, both furnished in the last week, mostly with stuff brought over from Hannibal's house. Chiyoh's had a blue and gold brocade bedspread and an antique Japanese chest of drawers. Will set her bag on the end of the bed. It fit right in.

The other room had a massive black wood bed frame, carved with some kind of hunt scene on the headboard, a black bedspread, and dark red curtains, which, at first glance, suggested that the ceiling might be bleeding. None of it went with the 1970s floral wallpaper.

Will's dad put his hands in his pockets and rocked on his heels a couple times in the doorway. "So who's the sacrifice? Is it me? You can tell me. I won't run. I've led a good life."

"Dad."

"You're not supposed to raise Hell until the honeymoon. Same goes for demons. Pretty sure."

Will sighed. "It's not that bad. It looked fine in his house."

"Does he realize he's not there no more? Or is this whole place gonna start sprouting antlers and fancy herbs?"

"He's talking about putting the herbs in the barn," Will said.

"Reckon I'd better come back for Christmas. Make sure you got a real tree."

Will hid a smile as he pushed back the curtains to let in the light. "Yeah, you'd better."

"Any chance of grandkids?"

Will's smile froze on his face. "What?"

“You are getting married. I’d call it a reasonable question.”

“I — We haven’t talked about it.”

“Well, get on that. And report back. And if you get a yes, tell him I get final say on the nursery decorations. I’m going back for my stuff.”

His dad left the room, and Will sank slowly onto the edge of the massive bed. The idea of kids hadn’t even occurred to him. Not once, not with Hannibal or any previous partner. Hannibal wouldn’t want that. The mess, the noise. Will was lucky he put up with the dogs, and it’d be impossible with how much they both worked, and if Will went back to work with Jack the travel—

“Will?”

Will started badly when Hannibal touched his shoulder. Hannibal’s grip stayed firm. He sat down next to Will on the bed. “What is it?”

“Nothing. Just — thinking.”

“About?”

“Nothing.” Will shook his head. “Nothing. My dad might come back for Christmas.”

“I’d be pleased to see him again.”

“And he thinks your guest room looks like a Satanic ritual.”

Hannibal paused. “We may need to do some redecorating. There was so little time.”

“We could’ve put it off.”

“I didn’t want to put it off.”

“No. Me neither.”

It had all been rushed like a shotgun wedding, like they were each afraid the other might change his mind. But neither of them had, and here they were. They had the license. Hannibal had asked an acquaintance to officiate — a priest, pastor, or minister of uncertain denomination, or at least uncertain to Will, who hadn’t thought to ask. They had more food than a dozen people could possibly eat, and the weather looked good. It had come together with almost worrying ease, but things did that, for Hannibal. Maybe in this case, Will could depend on his luck.

“Tomorrow,” Will said.

Hannibal took his hand. “Tomorrow.”

*

Tomorrow came with a dawn thunder storm that rattled the windows but left the sky an open, washed blue by eight. Hannibal would not be moved from the kitchen by threat, force, or hungry dogs. Will decided they'd have to make do with canned stuff and kibble for the day and fed them on the front porch.

Chiyoh slipped up next to him like a forest-scented shadow, rain and falling leaves and the faint scent of gunpowder. She stood with her hands clasped behind her back and watched the dogs bury their faces in their food bowls. She said nothing.

"Hannibal's got a cologne like that," Will said.

"It is the same. He sent it to me from a shop in Florence." She nodded to the dogs. "Do they need anything else?"

"Just to pee on every bush they can. They don't need my help for that."

"Then come with me."

Will followed her out through dewy grass that he never bothered to cut, past one lingering unsold piece of farm equipment, and into the barn. It was filled, impossibly, with flowers.

White and black roses hung twined together in garlands from the beams. Black dahlias and white daisies dripped from the hayloft. Black and white calla lilies, black hellebore and white foxgloves, black tulips and trailing branches of white bridal veil. Will stared with his mouth open.

"Do you approve?" Chiyoh asked.

Will had to gape a few more seconds before he could manage an answer. "It's — yes. Did you do this?"

She inclined her head. "Hannibal asked me to."

"When? Last night?"

"A few days ago."

Will shook his head. "I don't know how anyone could do this in a few days. But thank you."

"Thank you," she said quietly. "I have not seen him happy since Mischa died. Not until I got here yesterday and saw him with you."

She left him standing in dappled flowers, breathing in spring and battling tears.

*

The ceremony started at ten. Beverly played the violin as he and Hannibal walked in together. Will was pretty sure she'd decided to do it on her own initiative, since Hannibal gave him a mildly raised eyebrow over it, but he just smiled back. Maybe she was a little out of practice, but he liked the sound of music rising up to the dusty shadows of his old barn.

Hannibal's mystery pastor asked them if they would each take the other, in sickness or in health, for richer or poorer, for as long as they both lived. Will's heart pounded and his chest felt hot, but at the same time it felt almost redundant. Of course they would. They already had.

Hannibal kissed him afterwards, their hands tangled together, rings starting to warm to their skin. Hannibal leaned his forehead against Will's, and Will found himself tearing up for the second time that day.

Will jerked his head up when a flash went off. They hadn't hired a photographer, and though various people had been taking cell phone pictures, none of them had the flash on. He looked around and caught a flash of red and leopard print disappearing out the door of the barn.

Will looked accusingly at Jack and Zeller, but Zeller held up his hands in denial and Jack was frowning after Freddie Lounds like he might go after her. Bella put a hand on his arm, but the thought came too late anyway. Hannibal was already striding down the aisle, and Chiyoh was missing as well.

He jogged after them. The look on Hannibal's face was so searingly angry that it had passed out of the realm of expression and into a cold chipped-ice fixedness that almost frightened even Will. It wouldn't frighten Freddie Lounds. She would say something glib, and Will wasn't sure what would happen when Hannibal's expression cracked. It might be better for everyone if he didn't catch up with her at all.

But he did, or rather Chiyoh did. From the door of the barn, Will could see her just behind Freddie Lounds with Hannibal on the other side. Freddie was clutching her camera to her chest and wearing a fixed expression of her own as she tried to edge away and failed.

Hannibal had produced charcoal gray tuxedos for him and Will that morning, and Chiyoh wore a dress only a shade lighter. Freddie, between them, looked as if she were about to be draped in a funeral shroud. Or maybe that was Will's overactive imagination. He hoped so, given that they had witnesses, all of whom now crowded into the barn door.

Jack started forward, but Will's dad stopped him this time. "Leave him be. His house, his wedding. Man's got a right to settle things how he wants."

Jack looked at Will, and Will, reluctantly, set off after Hannibal. A man might have a right to settle things, but his husband probably had a responsibility to make sure he didn't get arrested in the process.

But, by the time he got close enough to hear what they were saying, Freddie Lounds was handing over her memory card. "I think the least you can do is pay me," she was saying. "Those are good photos. Wedding photography is pricey these days."

"Unasked for wedding photography can carry a steep price as well, Ms. Lounds."

"How the hell is my wedding news?" Will said.

“I didn’t know it was your wedding. Someone forgot to invite me,” She gave him what she probably thought was a charming smile. “Can you imagine? I just spotted half the BAU headed out here and I figured there was some big case they wanted you for.”

“So you just decided to sneak in and spy on us?”

“You’re surprised by that?”

Will and Hannibal looked at each other. No, they were not, but Hannibal still looked like he wanted her to pay in harder currency than her memory card. Freddie tried to edge away again, and Chiyoh clamped a hand on her shoulder so hard she flinched.

Hannibal took a slow breath. “Will, if you would see to our guests? I’d like to speak to Ms. Lounds for a moment.”

Will wasn’t one hundred percent on board with leaving them alone together — or alone with Chiyoh, which might be worse — but Hannibal did look calmer now. He retreated to the barn, but couldn’t get any of them back inside. All of them watched as Hannibal spoke and Freddie Lounds grew ghost pale under her leopard print hat. When she handed over her camera and gave her bag to Chiyoh to search, Jack made a satisfied grunt.

“Is there some reason you got paparazzi at your wedding?” Will’s dad asked.

“She’s a crime reporter,” Jack said.

Beverly made a face. “She runs an online murder tabloid more like, and she’s said some nasty stuff about Will.”

“TattleCrime,” Mrs. Komeda said unexpectedly. “I don’t approve of her tactics, of course, but it is terribly informative.”

“If you don’t mind that a third of it’s made up,” Zeller said under his breath.

“More than a third,” Price said. “Whoa, hey, wait a minute!” He caught Buster’s collar as Buster rushed past his feet, yipping.

Will picked him up. The rest of the dogs were watching politely from the back of the barn where he’d asked them to sit during the ceremony. “You’re a little late, buddy.” He glanced at Hannibal and Chiyoh, who were escorting Freddie Lounds back to her car. “Let’s go inside. I’m not sue if the food’s ready, but the drinks are.”

Plates of bite-sized food waited for them, Hannibal and Chiyoh rejoined them after they’d seen off Freddie Lounds’s car. Hannibal put an actual record on an actual record player, which delighted Will’s dad, and they settled down to eat and drink and talk. Will had worried about how everyone would get along, but Freddie had done them a favor, in a way. She’d given everyone something to talk about. Later in the day, after Will had watched his father hit on Mrs. Komeda, he retired to the porch with a shot of whiskey in his lemonade.

Hannibal found him there and kissed the back of Will’s neck. “Are you well?”

“I’m fine. As long as you’re fine with my dad possibly dating your ex.”

“I think they would make quite an interesting match.” Hannibal paused, one arm around Will’s waist. “Will you tell me what you were thinking of last night?”

Of course Hannibal hadn’t forgotten. Will leaned back into his warmth and looked out over the fields. He knew he should. He’d probably feel better if he did. But the words wouldn’t come. “I will. Just not yet, okay?”

“All right. Then will you come inside? It’s time for dessert.”

Will let himself be drawn inside. He hadn’t seen their wedding cake and wasn’t sure even when Hannibal had found time to make it, but it stood now in the center of his old kitchen table, three layers of smooth black fondant with white flowers, both real and handmade. On top sat a spun sugar anatomical heart with more flowers dripping from its severed arteries.

Will’s dad gave him a look and then rolled his eyes upward at the Satanic bedroom. Will had to stifle his smile with a cough.

“I love it,” Beverly said fervently. “I would get married just to have this cake.”

“You must wait until you taste it to judge it fairly,” Hannibal said. He cut into it and fed Will the first sliver — red and dark and rich with chocolate.

As he served their guests, it occurred to Will that not one of them seemed to think it was an odd choice for a wedding. It was probably about what they’d expected. To be known that well wasn’t something Will had often experienced in his life. It was a naked feeling, but not entirely bad.

Much later, after the guests had departed, after dinner — cooked by Will and his dad while Hannibal and Chiyoh talked out on the porch — Will and Hannibal settled into bed together. Their bed, their bedroom. Their house. Hannibal’s house was nearly empty now. He’d put it on the market and already had an offer.

Hannibal leaned over and laid his head on Will’s chest. “I know this is our wedding night and I don’t wish to set a precedent, but I am more tired than I expected to be.”

Will laid a hand over the back of his head and smiled up into the dark. “I have a feeling a lot of wedding nights go like that. Sleep. We’ve got plenty of time.”

“The honeymoon,” Hannibal mumbled.

“Got it covered. Real rustic, plenty of fish guts. You’ll love it.”

Hannibal grunted but made no actual objection. He was asleep before Will switched off the light.

Will lay awake, feeling Hannibal’s warmth and breath and weight. Words circled his mind endlessly: *this is your life now, this is yours.* The knowledge had circled the edges of awareness all day, like dawn sliding over the top of a hill. He could almost believe it now.

the honeymoon

Chapter Notes

Thanks so much to louiselux for the beta! <3

Hannibal stepped out of the airport and into the bright Miami sun. He slid on a pair of sunglasses and looked at Will. “A cabin by a lake. I believe those were your words. Fish guts and so on.”

“There’ll be plenty of fish guts, don’t worry.”

Will got them a taxi and gave the driver the name of the marina. About an hour later, paperwork signed and keys received, the rental agent shook Will’s hand and left them to board a 33’ sloop, white fiberglass hull and mahogany cabin, the Malabar Star.

“She’s not huge inside,” Will said. “But I think we’ll be okay. You want to see?”

“I do,” Hannibal said softly. It was the first time he’d spoken since he saw the boat. “You’ve surprised me once again.”

“You don’t get seasick, right?”

“Never.”

“Yeah, I didn’t think your stomach would dare.” He nudged Hannibal forward. “Well?”

They boarded the Star. She wasn’t roomy, but every part of her was neat and clean, polished wood with brass accents both inside the cabin and up on deck. The seats at the back of the cabin pulled out into a bed. The galley was the best Will had been able to find.

He watched with a queasy feeling as Hannibal looked over the setup and supplies and let out a silent breath when they got a nod of approval.

“It’s okay?” Will said. “All of it? I wanted it to be a surprise, but I get that it’s a pretty big surprise. We can ditch it if you want and find a hotel.”

Hannibal put one hand at his waist and the other on his cheek. He looked at Will so intently for so long that Will had to drop his eyes. That was when Hannibal kissed him, soft and slow, just catching Will’s lower lip between his. “I don’t want a hotel. Where shall we go?”

“Anywhere,” Will said. “We can sail down to the Keys. The Caribbean. Wherever you want.”

“Do we start now? Or is it too late in the day?”

“We can start. We won’t get far tonight.”

“All the same, let us go,” Hannibal said.

*

They anchored that night off Key Biscayne. Hannibal helped Will choose the anchorage, frowning faintly over the charts.

“M is for a mud bottom,” Will had told him.

“Is that good or bad?”

“In this case good. It should hold the anchor pretty well. And we’ve got room to swing around here.”

“And we will be in the lee of the island.”

Will had smiled at the top of his bent head, more pleased than he wanted to show. “You’ve got it. By the end of this, you’ll be sailing her yourself.”

Now, bound to the ocean floor for the night, anchor light on, they rocked on soft seas. Hannibal had cooked pepper steaks for dinner, and Will had promised him fish the next day.

They lay facing each other on the bed that took up half the cabin. “Second chance at a wedding night,” Will said.

Hannibal looked up and down the length of his body. Even fully clothed, Will felt it on his skin. He leaned in, and Hannibal leaned in, and their noses bumped like it was their first kiss. Will breathed out a laugh. Hannibal touched the corner of his mouth where it had pulled into a rueful smile.

“Feels weird,” Will said.

“What does?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never been married before.”

“Nor have I. I never expected to be.”

“I know. Me neither.” The silence between them got loud after a few seconds, and Will had to break it. “Well. We’ve got the rest of our lives to get used to it.”

“So we do.”

More silence. Hannibal watched him without blinking for so long that Will had to blink several times in sympathy. He wet his lips and looked down. “My dad asked about having kids.”

Hannibal pulled back an inch. It looked involuntary. His eyes were just as unblinking and wider than before.

“That looks like a no,” Will said.

“I had never considered it as an option.”

“Neither had I.”

“You are considering it now?”

“I’m not — I don’t know. I’m just asking.” Will rolled onto his stomach and blew out a breath into the quilt. “Bad time to bring it up, huh?”

Hannibal laid a warm palm against the small of his back. “It was on your mind.”

“It’s — yeah. It’s been on my mind. Since he said it. I never thought about it before and now — it’s a lot to think about.”

“It is.” Hannibal kissed his shoulder. “We have time to think about it. And to talk about it. All the time we need.”

Will turned toward him and let himself be pulled into Hannibal’s arms. “I don’t know. I just don’t know.”

“You don’t have to know.”

Will was quiet, breathing against Hannibal’s shoulder. “What if I do know?”

“Then I have no objections.”

Will started to ask if he really meant that and then stopped. If Hannibal said it, he meant it. Knots inside Will loosened, and he held Hannibal tighter. “I still want to talk about it. Think about it. Later.”

“Later,” Hannibal agreed, the word pressed with a kiss Will’s forehead. “For now...” He tugged at Will’s hair, pulled his head back, and exposed his throat for more kisses, for the sharp edge of teeth that made Will gasp and shift closer.

Will worked on Hannibal’s buttons while Hannibal worked on Will’s skin. The hot mouth on his throat was a distraction. The hands sliding under his shirt to rub hard at his nipples were worse.

“You’re not helping,” Will said. The last word went up in pitch and volume as Hannibal pinched him.

“Am I not?”

“Do you want me to just rip all the buttons off this shirt?”

“Only if you plan to sew them back on personally.”

Will paused. He pushed Hannibal down on the bed, took his shirt tails one in each hand, and pulled. It took a couple of tries and more effort than he’d thought it would, but the buttons went flying and Hannibal looked up at him with half-lidded eyes and a faint smile.

“Sorry now?” Will asked, knowing the answer.

“Not in the least. Especially not since I can return measure for measure.”

“What—“

Hannibal gripped the back of Will’s shirt in two handfuls and pulled. The fabric strained. Hannibal held Will’s gaze.

Will swallowed. “That’s not just buttons.”

“And I do not promise to repair the damage.”

The fabric gave, and the shirt rent up the back. Hannibal pulled it from him in pieces. He set his teeth thoughtfully at one ragged edge and tore a strip off and looked at Will.

“Yes,” Will said. “Whatever you’re thinking about doing with that, yes.”

“You may be surprised.”

“Yeah, you’re full of surprises.”

“We ought to undress then.”

They got out of the rest of their clothes with no further casualties, pants and socks and underwear pushed to the foot of the bed.

Hannibal ripped off another strip of fabric. “Come here. Spread your legs.”

Will did, and he fit himself between them, close, cocks sliding together. And then he twisted around to wrap the fabric around their legs just below the knees, binding them together. He knotted one side tight and then the other.

Will stared up at him, heartbeat picking up. He spread his legs wide, and Hannibal’s spread as well. He twisted side to side, but the knots held them bound together.

Hannibal stretched out over him, forearms braced on the bed. He dipped his head for a kiss that was only a brush of lips at first.

Will strained up into it. He closed his teeth on Hannibal’s lower lip and sucked. Every time he moved, he felt where they were bound together. “Is this premeditated? Or impulse?”

“Impulse,” Hannibal said. “I thought momentarily of binding our wrists together, but then how could I touch you?”

He slid his hands down Will's chest and pinched his nipples again lightly. Will closed his eyes and imagined his own hands pulled along for the ride, moving as Hannibal moved. "Do it."

"It will be awkward. More so to get out of it."

Will reached over for his bag and pulled his pocket knife from it. "We'll manage."

Hannibal nodded solemnly. He bound his left hand to Will's right. When he tied the knot on Will's right and his left, Will had to help him. Their fingers tangled over the scrap of cloth. The next second, they were kissing, grasping at each other's bodies helplessly until Hannibal laced their fingers together and pressed Will down hard against the bed.

Will groaned, head tipped back and eyes closed. "Fuck me. No. Fuck, that's not going to work, is it?"

"Difficult," Hannibal admitted. "Perhaps possible with some effort."

"No, this is good." Will shifted his hips and pressed up, cock sliding slowly against Hannibal's.

Hannibal let out a low, guttural sound. His eyes fluttered shut and opened to fix on Will's face. Will stared right back and watched Hannibal's focus narrow and tighten until he knew he was the only thing in Hannibal's world. And that knowledge was the best part of his own world.

The cloth chafed his wrists. He squeezed his fingers around Hannibal's hands and dug his nails into the backs. Hannibal curled his feet under Will's ankles for leverage as he began to move in long, slow rocks. His hair fell forward, damp tips brushing Will's forehead.

The air between their bodies grew hot and damp. Hannibal's lips touched his but they didn't kiss. They moved. They rocked. Their lips were only part of their bodies, one more part to touch and rub and feel.

Sweat dampened their palms and made them slippery. Their cocks and stomachs were sticky with fluid. Will tried to thrust up harder, aching with want, but he could do nothing without Hannibal, and Hannibal could do nothing without him. The bonds held them close, confined, together.

But, together, they could move faster. Will squeezed his legs together to help support Hannibal's weight. Hannibal pressed down against his hands and slid the length of their bodies against each other, skin damp with sweat, faster and faster.

Will was nearly panting, mouth wide open. "Come on. Come on, yes—"

Hannibal dipped his head for another touch of lips that slid off over Will's cheek and up to his hairline. Hannibal licked at the sweat there and breathed it in.

"I love you," Will said, eyes squeezed shut. "I love you, I love you, I—"

Hannibal came against him without a sound and kept moving, rubbing wet heat against Will's cock, breath unsteady against Will's hair.

Will clenched his teeth and grabbed Hannibal's hands. He closed his thighs hard around him and arched up as his cock jerked again and again. He might still have been speaking, but he couldn't hear it over the roaring in his ears.

Hannibal was saying his name, over and over. Will's eyes stung. He wanted to hold Hannibal close and had to settle for turning them onto their sides and pulling their arms between them and kissing Hannibal's hands and wrists and fingers and finally his mouth.

"Must we take them off?" Hannibal said, voice rough.

Will shook his head. They'd have to soon. The cloth was cutting into the backs of his knees, and the leg bearing Hannibal's weight was falling asleep. But right now, he couldn't imagine moving.

into the night

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will left Hannibal in bed, arms, legs, and hair all going in different directions. The bruises around his wrists and legs were soft shadows on his skin, and he smiled in his sleep.

Will looked down at his own wrists. In the sunlight, the purple showed strong and vivid, splotched with pink. All the colors were brighter this morning. The deep blue of the sky, the dark blue of the sea covered in sparks where the sun hit it. Even his fishing line glowed. He'd been out since dawn, and dawn had been every color at once.

Will's second fish of the day emerged from the water at the same time that Hannibal emerged from the cabin. It was bigger than the first and fought him. Will had to let the line out, let it run, and reel it back in. As he did, Hannibal came to stand beside him. He smelled like sweat and sex and bed, and Will nearly let the fish go.

Hannibal must've seen him wavering. "Is that our supper?"

"Maybe. I've got breakfast." Will nodded to the bucket beside him. It contained seawater and a mid-sized speckled trout.

Hannibal sat down with his legs over the side, barefoot and bare chested. He picked up Will's knife and reached into the bucket to grasp the fish with his other hand. He pushed the knife in behind the gills and twisted it sharply. The fish flopped in his hand once and then it was still. Hannibal slit it open and scooped out its guts with two fingers.

"You're staring," Hannibal said.

Will focused on his fish. His face felt hot. Maybe a little sunburn. "Does your fishmonger sell them with the guts still in?"

"A matter of basic anatomy." Hannibal paused. "I have of course done it before. Tempted as I am to let you believe otherwise." He used the back of the knife to scrape the scales off into the water.

"Of course." Will watched out of the corner of his eye as he reeled in his catch. He thought the fish might make another run for it, but it only thrashed weakly, frothing the water, and finally hung from his hook as he hauled it onto the deck — a silver kingfish as long as his arm.

They both watched its death throes. Will blinked in the light reflected off its scales. And then Hannibal brought the knife down and disposed of it as quickly as he had the trout. Its guts followed the trout's into the water.

"What are you going to do with it?"

“I shall see what presents itself. But first, our breakfast.” Hannibal stood and took the fish with him down to the galley.

Will lay back flat on the deck and stared up into the eye-searing blue of the sky. Soon the smell of cooking drifted up from the cabin.

*

They sailed south along Hawk Channel down to Key Largo and spent a night and a day there while Hannibal stuffed the galley with things the rental company hadn’t thought to provide, mostly spices, but also three different kinds of salt.

The rest of the day they spent staring at the water, side by side. Hannibal had made Will’s catch into sushi for lunch, and Will made multiple trips to the refrigerator to pick at the leftovers all afternoon. They drank wine. Will’s ears turned pink in the sun, despite the sunblock.

“We’ll cross to Cat Cay tonight,” he said. “We should make it right around dawn.”

“So that we can see the land approaching?”

“Yeah, safer that way. And there’s not much to see until then. Just a lot of water.”

But it was this night crossing of the Gulf Stream, out of sight of any land and wrapped in the dark and the stars, that had fixed Will on this trip. It was the thought of being alone with Hannibal, truly alone. He looked over and found Hannibal watching him over the top of his sunglasses.

“I have the only view I need,” Hannibal said.

Will faked a groan. “Don’t start that.”

“I’ll refrain for the moment. Shall we make a start instead? The sun is setting.”

“Yeah. We can get going.”

They pulled away from the keys as the sun sank. Behind them, the marina lights came on. Around them, in the shipping lanes, bigger commercial craft moved, their bulk just visible against the deep purple sky, navigation lights barely a blip in the enormous night.

Soon, they left the coastal traffic behind entirely. Two hours out, Will stood on deck in the cool air and saw nothing but stars in any direction.

Hannibal came to stand behind him and slip his arms around Will’s waist.

Will leaned back into him. “I wanted you to see this.”

“I see it,” Hannibal said quietly.

The stars over the ocean had a sharpness they didn't have anywhere else. Will rested his head on Hannibal's shoulder and stared up until he felt dizzy. "We could keep going. Buy our own boat."

"Disappear into uncharted territory?"

"Yeah."

"Is that what you want?"

"Sometimes," Will said.

Hannibal kissed his temple. When he spoke, his lips moved against Will's skin. "And sometimes you think of your father. A family. Your friends."

Will closed his eyes and felt the world turn around them. "Sometimes all I think about is you."

"I admit that I prefer those times."

Will turned in his arms. They leaned together. Their foreheads touched and then their lips. Hannibal's breath and body were a warm island in the night air.

"A family," Will repeated. "You're okay with that?"

"We are already a family."

Will smiled helplessly into the dark. "Yeah. So, you wouldn't mind being a larger one?"

"I would not mind." He curved a hand over the back of Will's head. "I would welcome it. Though I've had little to do with them for many years, I am fond of children."

Will could almost see Mischa sometimes when Hannibal talked about her. Or sometimes, like now, when he didn't.

"Not right away, okay? In a year or so. So we have some time. Like this."

Hannibal cupped Will's face with both hands and then took his wrists. He slid his thumbs unerringly over the bruises left by their bonds. "Like this."

"Yes."

Hannibal kissed his wrists, and Will returned the gesture. They sailed on into the night.

Chapter End Notes

And that's it, the end. Bless you all for sticking with this. <3

End Notes

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